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THE

WORKS

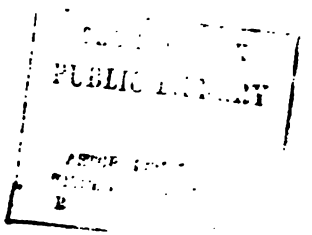
OF

VOLTAIRE.

VOL. XV.

Being VOL. IV. of his

DRAMATIC WORKS.



MEROPE.

THE

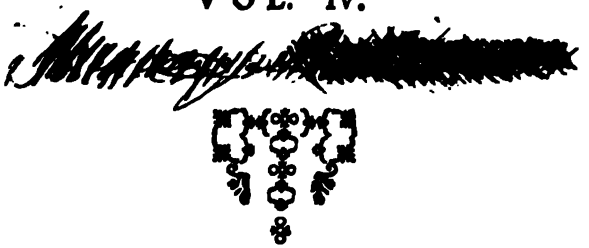
DRAMATIC WORKS

OF

Mr. DE VOLTAIRE.

Tranſlated by the Rev. Mr. FRANCKLIN.

VOL. IV.



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This VOLUME contains

MEROPE. A Tragedy.

PREFACE to NANINE. A Comedy.

NANINE. A Comedy.

The BABBLER. A Comedy.

An EPISTLE DEDICATORY to Mr. FALKNER, an *Engliſh* Merchant, ſince Ambaſſador at *Conſtantinople.*

A Second LETTER to Mr. FALKNER, then Ambaſſador at *Conſtantinople.*

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

MEROPE, Widow of Creſphontes, King of Meſſene.
ÆGISTHUS, Son of Merope.
POLIPHONTES, Tyrant of Meſſene.
NARBAS, an old Man.
EURICLES, Favourite of Merope.
EROX, Favourite of Poliphontes.
ISMENIA, Confidant of Merope.

SCENE at MESSENE, in the Palace of Merope.

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

A

TRAGEDY.

ACT I. SCENE I.

ISMENIA, MEROPE.

ISMENIA.

LET not, great queen, thy ſoul for ever dwell
On images of horror and deſpair;
The ſtorm is paſt, and brighter days ſucceed:
Long haſt thou taſted heav'ns ſevereſt wrath,
Enjoy its bounties now: the gods, thou ſeeſt,
Have bleſs'd our land with victory and peace;
And proud Meſſene, after fifteen years
Of foul diviſion and inteſtine wars,
Now from her ruins lifts her tow'ring front,
Superior to misfortune: now no more
Shalt thou behold her angry chiefs ſupport
Their jarring int'reſts, and in guilt alone
United, ſpread deſtruction, blood, and ſlaughter,

O'er half thy kingdom, and diſpute the throne
Of good Creſphontes: but the miniſters
Of heav'n, the guardians of our ſacred laws,
The rulers, and the people, ſoon ſhall meet,
Free in their choice, to fix the pow'r ſupreme:
If virtue gives the diadem, 'tis thine:
Thine by irrevocable right: to thee,
The widow of Creſphontes, from our kings
Deſcended, muſt devolve Meſſene's throne:
Thou, whom misfortunes and firm conſtancy
Have made but more illuſtrious, and more dear;
Thou, to whom ev'ry heart in ſecret ty'd——

MEROPE.

No news of Narbas! ſhall I never ſee
My child again?

ISMENIA.

Deſpair not, madam: ſlaves
Have been diſpatch'd on every ſide; the paths
Of Elis all are open to their ſearch:
Doubtleſs the object of your fears is plac'd
In faithful hands, who will reſtore to you
Their ſacred truſt.

MEROPE.

Immortal gods! who ſee
My bitter griefs, will ye reſtore my ſon?
Is my Ægiſthus living? have you ſav'd

My

My wretched infant? O preſerve him ſtill,
And ſhield him from the cruel murth'rer's hand!
He is your ſon, the pure the ſpotleſs blood
Of your Alcides. Will you not protect
The dear dear image of the beſt of men,
The beſt of kings, whoſe aſhes I adore.

ISMENIA.

But wherefore muſt this tender paſſion turn
Thy ſoul aſide from ev'ry other purpoſe?

MEROPE.

I am a mother: can'ſt thou wonder yet?

ISMENIA.

A mother's fondneſs ſhou'd not thus efface
The duty of a queen, your character,
And noble rank; tho' in his infant years
You lov'd this ſon, yet little have you ſeen
Or known of him.

MEROPE.

Not ſeen him, my Iſmenia?
O he is always preſent to my heart,
Time has no pow'r to looſe ſuch bonds as theſe;
His danger ſtill awakens all my fears,
And doubles my affection: once I've heard
From Narbas, and but once theſe four years paſt,
And *that alas! but made* me more unhappy.

Ægiſthus, then he told me, well deſerves
A better fate; he's worthy of his mother,
And of the gods, his great progenitors;
Expos'd to ev'ry ill, his virtue braves,
And will ſurmount them: hope for ev'ry thing
From him, but be aware of Poliphontes.

ISMENIA.

Prevent him then, and take the reins of empire
In your own hands.

MEROPE.

That empire is my ſon's:
Perdition on the cruel ſtep-mother,
The lover of herſelf, the ſavage heart,
That cou'd enjoy the pleaſures of a throne,
And diſinherit her own blood! O no: Iſmenia,
If my Ægiſthus lives not, what is empire,
Or what is life to me! I ſhou'd renounce them.
I ſhou'd have dy'd when my unhappy lord
Was baſely ſlain, by men and gods betray'd.
O perfidy! O guilt! O! fatal day!
O death! for ever preſent to my ſight!
Methinks ev'n now I hear the diſmal ſhrieks,
I hear them cry, 'O ſave the king, his wife,
His ſons:' I ſee the walls all ſtain'd with blood,
The flaming palace, helpleſs women cruſh'd

Bew

Beneath the ſmoking ruins, fear and tumult
On ev'ry ſide, arms, torches, death, and horror:
Then, roll'd in duſt, and bathing in his blood,
Creſphontes preſs'd me to his arms, upraiſ'd
His dying eyes, and took his laſt farewell;
Whilſt his two hapleſs babes, the tender fruits
Of our firſt love, thrown on the bleeding boſom
Of their dead father, lifted up the hands
Of innocence, and begg'd me to protect them
Againſt the barbrous murtherers: Ægiſthus
Alone eſcap'd: ſome god defended him.
O thou who did'ſt protect his infancy
Watch o'er and guard him, bring him to my eyes;
O let him from inglorious ſolitude
Riſe to the rank of his great anceſtors!
I've borne his abſence long, and groan'd in chains
Theſe fifteen years: now let Ægiſthus reign
Inſtead of Merope: for all my pains
And ſorrows paſt, be that the great reward.

SCENE II.

MEROPE, ISMENIA, EURICLES.

MEROPE.

Well! what of Narbas, and my ſon?

EURICLES.

Confus'd
I ſtand before thee; all our cares are vain;
We've ſearch'd the banks of Peneus, and the fields
Of fair Olympia, even to the walls
Of proud Salmoneus, but no Narbas there
Is to be found or heard of, not a trace
Remaining of him.

MEROPE.

Narbas is no more,
And all is loſt.

ISMENIA.

Whate'er thy fears ſuggeſt
Thou ſtill believ'ſt; and yet who knows but now,
Ev'n whilſt we ſpeak, the happy Narbas comes
To crown thy wiſhes, and reſtore thy ſon.

EURICLES.

Perhaps his love, temper'd with fair diſcretion,
Which long conceal'd Ægiſthus from the eyes
Of men, may hide his purpos'd journey from thee:
He dreads the murth'rers hand, and ſtill protects him
From thoſe who ſlew Creſphontes: we muſt ſtrive
By artful methods to elude the rage
That cannot be oppos'd: I have ſecur'd
Their paſſage hither, and have plac'd ſome friends
Of moſt approved valour, whoſe ſharp eyes
Will look abroad, and ſafe conduct them to thee.

MEROPE.

I've plac'd my ſureſt confidence in thee.

EURICLES.

But what alas! can all my watchfulneſs
And faithful cares avail thee, when the people
Already meet to rob thee of thy right,
And place another on Meſſene's throne?
Injuſtice triumphs, and the ſhameleſs croud,
In proud contempt of ſacred laws, incline
To Poliphontes.

MEROPE.

Am I fall'n ſo low;
And ſhall my ſon return to be a ſlave?
To ſee a ſubject rais'd to the high rank
Of his great anceſtors, the blood of Jove
Debas'd, degraded, forc'd to own a maſter.
Have I no friend, no kind protector left?
Ungrateful ſubjects! have you no regard,
No rev'rence for the mem'ry of Creſphontes?
Have you ſo ſoon forgot his glorious deeds,
His goodneſs to you?

EURICLES.

Still his name is dear,
Still they regret him, ſtill they weep his fate,

And pity thine: but pow'r intimidates,
And makes them dread the wrath of Poliphontes.

MEROPE.

Thus, by my people ſtill oppreſs'd, I ſee
Juſtice give way to faction, int'reſt ſtill,
The arbiter of fate, ſells needy virtue
To pow'rful guilt; the weak muſt to the ſtrong
For ever yield: but let us hence, and ſtrive
To fire once more their coward hearts to rage
And fierce reſentment, for the injur'd blood
Of Hercules: excite the people's love;
Flatter their hopes; O tell 'em, Euricles,
Their maſter is return'd.

EURICLES.

I've ſaid too much
Already; Poliphontes is alarm'd:
He dreads your ſon; he dreads your very tears:
Reſtleſs ambition, that holds nothing dear
Or ſacred but itſelf, has fill'd his ſoul
With bitterneſs and pride: becauſe he drove
The ruffian ſlaves from Pylos and Amphryſa,
And ſav'd Meſſene from a band of robbers,
He claims it as his conqueſt: for himſelf
Alone he acts, and wou'd enſlave us all:
He looks towards the crown, and to attain it

Wou'd

Wou'd throw down ev'ry fence, break every law,
Spill any blood that ſhall oppoſe him: they
Who kill'd thy huſband were not more revengeful,
More bloody, than the cruel Poliphontes.

MEROPE.

I am entangled in ſome fatal ſnare
On ev'ry ſide, danger and guilt ſurround me:
This Poliphontes, this ambitious ſubject,
Whoſe crimes ——

EURICLES.

He's here: you muſt diſſemble.

SCENE III.

MEROPE. POLIPHONTES, EROX.

POLIPHONTES.

Madam,
At length I come to lay my heart before you:
I've ſerv'd the ſtate, and my ſucceſsful toils
Have open'd me a paſſage to the throne:
Th' aſſembled chiefs a while ſuſpend their choice,
But ſoon muſt fix it, or on Merope,
Or Poliphontes: the unhappy feuds
That laid Meſſene waſte, and fill'd the land
With blood and ſlaughter, all are bury'd now
In peaceful harmony, and we alone
Remain to part the fair inheritance.

We ſhou'd ſupport each other's mutual claim;
Our common int'reſt, and our common foes,
Love for our country, reaſon, duty, all
Conſpire to join us, all unite to ſay
The warrior, who reveng'd thy huſband, he
Who ſav'd thy kingdom, may aſpire to thee.
I know theſe hoary locks, and wrinkled brow,
Have little charms to pleaſe a youthful fair one.
Thou'rt in the bloom of ſpring, and may'ſt deſpiſe
The winter of my days; but ſtateſmen heed not
Such fond objections: let the royal wreath
Hide theſe grey hairs, a ſceptre and a queen
Will recompenſe my toils: nor think me raſh,
Or vain, you are the daughter of a king,
I know you are, but your Meſſene wants
A maſter now; therefore remember, madam,
If you wou'd keep your right, you muſt — divide it.

MEROPE.

Heav'n, that afflicts me with its bitt'reſt woes,
Prepar'd me not for this, this cruel inſult:
How dar'ſt thou aſk it? wert thou not the ſubject
Of great Creſphontes? think'ſt thou I will e'er
Betray the mem'ry of my deareſt lord,
To ſhare with thee his ſon's inheritance,
Truſt to thy hands his kingdom and his mother?

Think'ſt

Think'ſt thou the royal wreath was made to bind
A ſoldier's brows?

POLIPHONTES.

That ſoldier has a right
To rule the kingdom which his arm defended.
What was the firſt that bore the name of king,
But a ſucceſsful ſoldier? he who ſerves
His country well requires not anceſtry
To make him noble: the inglorious blood,
Which I receiv'd from him who gave me life,
I ſhed already in my country's cauſe,
It flow'd for thee; and, ſpite of thy proud ſcorn,
I muſt at leaſt be equal to the kings
I have ſubdued: but, to be brief with you,
The throne will ſoon be mine, and Merope
May ſhare it with me, if her pride will deign
T'accept it; I've a pow'rful party, madam.

MEROPE.

A party! wretch, to trample on our laws:
Is there a party which thou dar'ſt ſupport
Againſt the king's, againſt the royal race?
Is this thy faith, thy ſolemn vows, thy oath,
Sworn to Creſphontes, and to me; the love,
The honour due to his illuſtrious ſhade,

His wretched widow, and his hapleſs ſon;
The gods he ſprang from, and the throne they gave?

POLIPHONTES.

'Tis doubtful whether yet your ſon ſurvives;
But grant that, from the manſions of the dead,
He ſhou'd return, and in the face of heav'n
Demand his throne, believe me when I ſay
He wou'd demand in vain; Meſſene wants
A maſter worthy of her, one well prov'd,
A king who cou'd defend her: he alone
Shou'd wield the ſceptre who can beſt revenge
His country's cauſe: Ægiſthus is a child,
Yet unexperienc'd in the ways of men,
And therefore little will his birth avail him;
Nought hath he done for us, and nought deſerv'd:
He cannot purchaſe at ſo cheap a rate
Meſſene's throne, the right of pow'r ſupreme
Deſcends no more, the gift of nature, here
From ſon to ſon; it is the price of toil,
Of labour, and of blood; 'tis virtue's meed,
Which I ſhall claim: have you ſo ſoon forgot
The ſavage ſons of Pylos and Amphryſa,
Thoſe lawleſs plund'rers? think on your Creſphontes
And your defenceleſs children, whom they ſlew:
Who ſav'd your country then? who ſtopp'd their fury

Wh

Who put your foes to flight, and chaſed them hence?
Did not this arm revenge that murther'd lord
Whom yet you weep? theſe, madam, are my rights,
The rights of valour: this is all my rank,
This all my title, and let heav'n decide it.
If thy Ægiſthus comes, by me perhaps
He may be taught to live, by me to reign:
Then ſhall he ſee how Poliphontes guides
The reins of empire. I eſteem the blood
Of great Alcides, but I fear it not;
I look beyond Alcides' race, and fain
Wou'd imitate the god from whom he ſprung:
I wou'd defend the mother, ſerve the ſon;
Be an example to him, and a father.

MEROPE.

O, ſir, no more of your affected cares;
Your gen'rous offers, meant but to inſult
My hapleſs ſon; if you wou'd wiſh to tread
In great Alcides' ſteps, reſerve the crown
For his deſcendant: know, that demi-god
Was the avenger of wrong'd innocence;
No raviſher, no tyrant; take thou care,
And with his valour imitate his juſtice;
Protect the guiltleſs, and defend your king,
Elſe ſhalt thou prove a worthleſs ſucceſſor.

If thou wou'dſt gain the mother, ſeek the ſon;
Go, bring him to me; bring your maſter here,
And then perhaps I may deſcend to you:
But I will never be the vile accomplice,
Or the reward of guilt like thine.

SCENE IV.

POLIPHONTES, EROX.

EROX.

My lord,
Did you expect to move her? Does the throne
Depend on her capricious will? Muſt ſhe
Conduct you to it?

POLIPHONTES.

'Twixt that throne and me,
Erox, I ſee a dreadful precipice
I muſt o'erleap, or periſh: Merope
Expects Ægiſthus; and the fickle croud,
If he returns, perhaps may bend towards him.
In vain his father's and his brother's blood,
Have open'd wide my paſſage to the throne;
In vain hath fortune caſt her friendly veil
O'er all my crimes; in vain have I oppreſs'd
The blood of kings, whilſt the deluded people
Ador'd me as their friend, if yet there lives

A hateful offspring of Alcides' race:
If this lamented ſon ſhou'd e'er again
Behold Meſſene, fifteen years of toil
At once are loſt, and all my hopes o'erthrown;
All the fond prejudice of birth and blood
Will ſoon revive, the mem'ry of Creſphontes,
A hundred kings for his proud anceſtors,
The boaſted honour of a race divine,
A mother's tears, her ſorrows, her deſpair,
All will conſpire to ſhake my feeble pow'r:
Ægiſthus is a foe I muſt ſubdue:
I wou'd have cruſh'd the ſerpent in his ſhell,
But that the diligent and ſubtle Narbas
Convey'd him hence, e'er ſince that time conceal'd
In ſome far diſtant land, he hath eſcap'd
My narroweſt ſearch, and baffled all my care:
I ſtopp'd his couriers, broke th' intelligence
'Twixt him and Merope; but fortune oft
Deſerts us: from the ſilence of oblivion
Sometimes a ſecret may ſpring forth; and heav'n,
By ſlow and ſolemn ſteps, may bring down vengeance.

EROX.

Depend, undaunted, on thy proſp'rous fate;
Prudence, thy guardian god, ſhall ſtill protect thee:
Thy orders are obey'd; the ſoldiers watch

Each

Each avenue to Elis and Meſſene:
If Narbas brings Ægiſthus here, they both
Muſt die.

POLIPHONTES.

But ſay, can'ſt thou depend on thoſe
Whom thou haſt plac'd to intercept them?

EROX.

Yes;
None of them know whoſe blood is to be ſhed,
Or the king's name whom they muſt ſacrifice.
Narbas is painted to them as a traitor,
A guilty vagabond, that ſeeks ſome place
Of refuge; and the other, as a ſlave,
A murth'rer, to be yeilded up to juſtice.

POLIPHONTES.

It muſt be ſo: this crime, and I have done;
And yet, when I have rid me of the ſon,
I muſt poſſeſs the mother: 'twill be uſeful:
I ſhall not then be branded with the name
Of an uſurper; ſhe will bring with her
A noble portion in the people's love:
I know their hearts are not inclin'd to me;
With fears dejected, or inflam'd with hope,
Still in extremes, the giddy multitude
Tumultuous rove, and int'reſt only binds them,

That

That makes them mine. Erox, thy fate depends
On my ſucceſs; thou art my beſt ſupport:
Go, and unite them; bribe the ſordid wretch
With gold to ſerve me, let the ſubtle courtier
Expect my favours; raiſe the coward ſoul,
Inſpire the valiant, and careſs the bold;
Perſuade and promiſe, threaten and implore:
Thus far this ſword hath brought me on my way;
But what by courage was begun, by art
We muſt complete; that many headed monſter,
The people, muſt be ſooth'd by flatt'ry's pow'r:
I'm fear'd already, but I wou'd be lov'd.

END of the FIRST ACT.

ACT II. SCENE I.

MEROPE, EURICLES, ISMENIA.

MEROPE.

HAST thou heard nothing of my dear Ægiſthus?
No news from Elis' frontiers? O, too well
I know the cauſe of this ill-boding ſilence!

EURICLES.

EURICLES.

In all our ſearch we have diſcover'd nought,
Save a young ſtranger, reeking with the blood
Of one whom he had murther'd: we have chain'd,
And brought him hither.

MEROPE.

Ha! a murtherer,
A ſtranger too! whom, think'ſt thou, he has ſlain?
My blood runs cold.

EURICLES.

The mere effect of love
And tenderneſs: each little circumſtance
Alarms a ſoul like thine, that ever dwells
On one ſad object; 'tis the voice of nature,
And will be heard; but let not this diſturb thee,
A common accident: our borders long
Have been infeſted with theſe ruffian ſlaves,
The baneful fruit of our inteſtine broils;
Juſtice hath loſt her pow'r; our huſbandmen
Call on the gods for vengeance, and lament
The blood of half their fellow-citizens,
Slain by each other's hand: but, be compos'd,
Theſe terrors are not thine.

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

Who is this ſtranger?
Anſwer me, tell me.

EURICLES.

Some poor nameleſs wretch,
Such he appears; brought up to infamy,
To guilt, and ſorrow.

MEROPE.

Well, no matter who,
Or what he is; let him be brought before me.
Important truths are often brought to light
By meaneſt inſtruments. Perhaps my ſoul
Is too much mov'd; pity a woman's weakneſs,
Pity a mother who has all to fear,
And nothing to neglect: let him appear;
I'll ſee, and queſtion him.

EURICLES.

Your orders, madam,
Shall be obey'd.

[To Iſmenia.

Tell 'em to bring him here,
Before the queen.

MEROPE.

I know my cares are vain;
But grief o'erpow'rs, and hurries me to acts

Perhaps

Perhaps imprudent; but you know I've cauſe
For my deſpair; they have dethron'd my ſon,
And wou'd inſult the mother: Poliphontes
Hath ta'en advantage of my helpleſs ſtate,
And dar'd to offer me his hand.

EURICLES.

Thy woes
Are greater even than thou think'ſt they are.
I know this marriage wou'd debaſe thy honour,
And yet I ſee it muſt be ſo; thy fate
Hath bound thee to it by the cruel tie
Of dire neceſſity: I know it wears
A dreadful aſpect, yet perchance may prove
The only means of placing on the throne
Its rightful maſter, ſo th'aſſembled chiefs
And ſoldiers think; they wiſh———

MEROPE.

My ſon wou'd ne'er
Conſent to that; no: poverty and exile,
With all their pains, were far leſs dreadful to him
Than theſe baſe nuptials.

EURICLES.

If t' aſſert his rights
Alone, ſuffic'd to ſeat him on the throne,
Doubtleſs his pride wou'd ſpurn the ſhameful bond:

But

But if his ſoul is by misfortune taught
To know itſelf, if prudence guides his ſteps,
If his own int'reſt, if his friends advice,
And above all, neceſſity, the firſt
Of human laws, have any influence o'er him,
He wou'd perceive, that his unhappy mother
Cou'd not beſtow on him a dearer mark
Of her affection.

MEROPE.

Ha! what ſay'ſt thou?

EURICLES.

Truth,
Unwelcome truth, which nothing but my zeal,
And your misfortunes, ſhoul'd have wreſted from me.

MEROPE.

Wou'dſt thou perſuade me then, that int'reſt e'er
Can get the better of my fix'd averſion
For Poliphontes, you who painted him
In blackeſt colours to me?

EURICLES.

I deſcrib'd him
Ev'n as he is, moſt dangerous and bold;
I know his raſhneſs, and I know his pow'r;
Nought can reſiſt him, he's without an heir.
Remember that: you ſay, you love Ægiſthus.

MERO-

MEROPE.

I do; and 'tis that love which makes the tyrant
Still more deteſted: wherefore talk'ſt thou thus
Of marriage and of empire? ſpeak to me
Of my dear ſon; and tell me if he lives;
Inform me, Euricles.

EURICLES.

Behold the ſtranger
Whom you deſir'd to queſtion; ſee, he comes.

SCENE II.

MEROPE, EURICLES, ÆGISTHUS in cha
ISMENIA, Guards.

ÆGISTHUS, at the bottom of the ſtage. [To Iſme
Is that the great unfortunate, the queen,
Whoſe glory and whoſe ſorrows reach'd ev'n me
Amidſt the deſert wild where I was hid?

ISMENIA.

'Tis ſhe.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou great creator of mankind!
Thou, who didſt form thoſe matchleſs charms, l
down
And guard thy image: virtue on a throne
Is ſure the firſt and faireſt work of heav'n.

MERO

MEROPE.

Is that the murth'rer? Can ſuch features hide
A cruel heart? Come near, unhappy youth,
Be not alarm'd, but anſwer me; whoſe blood
Is on thy hands?

ÆGISTHUS.

O, queen, forgive me; fear,
Reſpect, and grief, bind up my trembling lips.
[Turning to Euricles.
I cannot ſpeak; her preſence ſhakes my ſoul
With terror and amazement.

MEROPE.

Tell me whom
Thy arm has ſlain.

ÆGISTHUS.

Some bold preſumptuous youth,
Whom fate condemn'd to fall the wretched victim
Of his own raſhneſs.

MEROPE.

Ha! a youth! my blood
Runs cold within me: didſt thou know him?

ÆGISTHUS.

No:
Meſſene's walls, her fields, and citizens,
Are new to me.

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

And did this unknown youth
Attack thee then? 'twas in thy own defence?

ÆGISTHUS.

Heav'n is my witneſs, I am innocent.
Juſt on the borders of Pamiſus, where
A temple ſtands, ſacred to Hercules,
Thy great progenitor, I offer'd up
To the avenger of wrong'd innocence
My humble prayers for thee; I had no victims,
No precious gifts to lay before him; all
I had to give him, was a ſpotleſs heart,
And ſimple vows, the poor man's hecatomb:
It ſeem'd as if the god receiv'd my homage
With kind affection, for I felt my heart
By more than common reſolution fir'd:
Two men, both arm'd, and both unknown, ſurpris'd me;
One in the bloom of youth, the other ſunk
Into the vale of years: what brings thee here?
They cry'd, and wherefore for Alcides' race:
Art thou a ſuppliant? At this word they rais'd
The dagger to my breaſt; but heav'n preſerv'd me.
Pierc'd o'er with wounds, the youngeſt of them fell
Dead at my feet; the other baſely fled

Like

Like an aſſaſſin: knowing not what blood
I might have ſhed, and doubtful of my fate,
I threw the bloody corpſe into the ſea,
And fled; your ſoldiers ſtopp'd me; at the name
Of Merope, I yeilded up my arms,
And they have brought me hither.

EURICLES.

Why theſe tears,
My royal miſtreſs?

MEROPE.

Shall I own it to thee?
I melted with compaſſion, as he told
His melancholy tale; I know not why,
But my heart ſympathis'd with his diſtreſs:
It cannot be, I bluſh to think it, yet
Methought I trac'd the features of Creſphontes:
Cruel remembrance! wherefore am I mock'd
With ſuch deceitful images as theſe,
Such fond deluſions?

EURICLES.

Do not then embrace
Such vain ſuſpicions, he's not that barbarian,
That vile impoſtor, which we thought him.

MEROPE.

No:
Heav'n hath imprinted on his open front

The marks of candour, and of honeſty.
Where wert thou born?

ÆGISTHUS.

In Elis.

MEROPE.

Ha! in Elis!
In Elis! ſayſt thou? Knowſt thou aught of Narbas,
Or of Ægiſthus? Never hath that name
Yet reach'd thine ear? What rank, condition, friends,
Who was thy father?

ÆGISTHUS.

Polycletes, madam,
A poor old man: to Narbas, or Ægiſthus,
Of whom thou ſpeak'ſt, I am a ſtranger.

MEROPE.

Gods!
Why mock ye thus a poor unhappy mortal?
A little dawn of hope juſt gleam'd upon me,
And now my eyes are plung'd in deepeſt night:
Say, what rank did thy parents hold in Greece?

ÆGISTHUS.

If virtue made nobility, old Sirris
And Polycletes, from whoſe blood I ſprang,
Are not to be deſpis'd: their lot indeed
Was humble, but their exemplary virtues
Made even poverty reſpectable:

Cloth'd

Cloth'd in his ruſtic garb, my honeſt father
Obeys the laws, does all the good he can,
And only fears the gods.

MEROPE. [Aſide.

How ſtrangely he affects me! ev'ry word
Has ſome new charm:

[Turning to Ægiſthus.

But wherefore left you then
The good old man? It muſt be dreadful to him
To loſe a ſon like thee.

ÆGISTHUS.

A fond deſire
Of glory led me hither: I had heard
Of your Meſſene's troubles, and your own:
Oft had I heard of the illuſtrious queen,
Whoſe virtues merited a better fate;
The ſad recital mov'd my ſoul; aſham'd
To ſpend at Elis my inglorious days,
I long'd to brave the terrors of the field
Beneath thy banners: this was my deſign,
And this alone: an idle thirſt of fame
Miſled my ſteps, and in their helpleſs age
Perſuaded me to leave my wretched parents:
'Tis my firſt fault, and I have ſuffer'd for it:
Heav'n hath aveng'd their cauſe, and I am fall'n
Into a fatal ſnare.

MEROPE.

'Tis plain he is not,
Cannot be guilty; falſehood never dwells
With ſuch ingenuous ſweet ſimplicity:
Heav'n has conducted here this hapleſs youth,
And I will ſtretch the hand of mercy to him:
It is enough for me he is a man,
And moſt unfortunate; my ſon perhaps
Ev'n now laments his more diſtreſsful fate:
O he recalls Ægiſthus to my thoughts:
Their age the ſame; perhaps Ægiſthus now
Wanders like him from clime to clime, unknown,
Unpity'd, ſuffers all the bitter woes
And cruel ſcorn that waits on penury:
Mis'ry like this will bend the firmeſt ſoul,
And wither all its virtues; lot ſevere
For a king's offspring, and the blood of gods!
O if at leaſt———

SCENE III.

MEROPE, ÆGISTHUS, EURICLES, ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

Hark! madam, heard you not
Their loud tumultuous cries? You know not what—

MEROPE.

Whence are thy fears?

ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

'Tis Poliphontes' triumph:
The wav'ring people flatter his ambition,
And give their voices for him; he is chos'n
Meſſene's king: 'tis done.

ÆGISTHUS.

I thought the gods
Had on the throne of her great Anceſtors
Plac'd Merope: O heav'n! the greater ſtill
Our rank on earth, the more have we to fear:
A poor abandon'd exile, like myſelf,
Is leſs to be lamented than a queen:
But we have all our ſorrows.

[Ægiſthus is led off.

EURICLES. [To Merope.

I foretold it:
You were to blame to ſcorn his proffer'd hand,
And brave his pow'r.

MEROPE.

I ſee the precipice
That opens wide its horrid gulph before me;
But men and gods deceiv'd me; I expected
Juſtice from both, and both refus'd to grant it.

EURICLES.

I will aſſemble yet our little force
Of truſty friends, to anchor our poor bark,

And ſave it from the fury of the ſtorm;
To ſhield thee from the inſults of a tyrant,
And the mad rage of an ungrateful people.

SCENE IV.

MEROPE, ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

'Tis not the people's fault; they love you ſtill,
And wou'd preſerve the honour of your crown:
They wiſh to ſee you join'd to Poliphontes,
That from your hand he then might ſeem to hold
The ſov'reign pow'r.

MEROPE.

They give me to a tyrant,
Betray Ægiſthus, and enſlave his mother.

ISMENIA.

They call you to the throne of your fore fathers:
Obey their voice; it is the voice of heav'n.

MEROPE.

And woud'ſt thou have me purchaſe empty honours
With infamy and ſhame?

SCENE V.

MEROPE, EURICLES, ISMENIA.

EURICLES.

O queen, I tremble
To ſtand before thee: now prepare thy heart

For the moſt dreadful ſtroke; call forth thy courage
To bear the news.

MEROPE.

I have no courage left,
'Tis worn out by misfortune · but no matter.
Proceed, inform me.

EURICLES.

All is paſt; and fate———
I can no more.

MEROPE.

Go on: my ſon———

EURICLES.

He's dead:
It is too true: the dreadful news hath ſhock'd
Your friends, and froze their active zeal.

MEROPE.

My ſon,
Ægiſthus, dead!

ISMENIA.

O gods!

EURICLES.

Some baſe aſſaſſins
Had in his paſſage laid the ſnares of death;
The horrid crime is done.

MEROPE.

O hateful day!
Why ſhines the ſun on ſuch a wretch as me?
He's loſt; he's gone: what cruel hand deſtroy'd him!
Who ſhed his blood, the laſt of my ſad race?

EURICLES.

It was that ſtranger, that abandon'd ſlave,
Whoſe perſecuted virtue you admir'd,
For whom ſuch pity roſe in your kind breaſt;
Ev'n he whom you protected.

MEROPE.

Can it be!
Was he that monſter?

EURICLES.

We have certain proofs,
And have diſcover'd two of his companions,
Who, lurking here, were ſtill in ſearch of Narbas,
Who had eſcap'd them: he who ſlew Ægiſthus
Had taken from your ſon theſe precious ſpoils,
[The armour is ſhewn at a diſtance at the further end of the ſtage.
The armour which old Narbas bore from hence.
The traitor, that he might not be diſcover'd,
Had thrown aſide theſe bloody witneſſes.

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

What haſt thou told me? O theſe trembling hands
Did on Creſphontes put that very armour
When firſt he went to battle. Ye dear reliques,
O to what hands were ye deliver'd! monſter,
To ſeize this ſacred armour.

EURICLES.

'Tis the ſame
Ægiſthus did bring hither.

MEROPE.

Now behold it
Stain'd with his blood! but in Alcides' temple
Did they not ſee a poor old man?

EURICLES.

'Twas Narbas:
So Poliphontes owns.

MEROPE.

O dreadful truth!
The villain, to conceal his crime, hath caſt
His body to the waves, and bury'd him
In the rude ocean: O I ſee it all,
All my ſad fate: O my unhappy ſon!

EURICLES.

Wou'd you not have the traitor brought before you,
And queſtion'd here?

SCENE VI.

MEROPE, EURICLES, ISMENIA, EROX, guards.

EROX.

Permit me in the name
Of Poliphontes, my rejected maſter,
Perhaps rejected but becauſe unknown,
To offer you, in this diſtreſsful hour,
His beſt aſſiſtance: he already knows
Ægiſthus is no more, and bears a part
In your misfortunes.

MEROPE.

That I know he does,
A joyful part, and reaps the fruits of them,
The throne of my Creſphontes, and Ægiſthus.

EROX.

That throne he wiſhes but to ſhare with you,
And throw his ſceptre at thy feet; the crown
He hopes will make him worthy of thy hand:
But to my hands the murth'rer muſt be giv'n,
For ſacred is the pow'r of puniſhment,
'Tis a king's duty; he alone muſt wield
The ſword of juſtice, the throne's beſt ſupport,
That to his people and to you he owes;
Mid'ſt hymen rites the murth'rers blood ſhall flow,
A grateful ſacrifice.

MEROP.

MEROPE.

My hand alone
Shall ſtrike the fatal blow: though Poliphontes
Reigns o'er Meſſene, he muſt leave to me
The work of vengeance: let him keep my kingdom,
But yield to me the right of puniſhment:
On that condition, and on that alone,
I will be his: go, and prepare the rites;
This hand, freſh bleeding from the traitor's boſom,
Shall at the altar join with Poliphontes.

EROX.

Doubtleſs, the king, whoſe ſympathetic heart
Feels for your woes, will readily conſent.

SCENE VI.

MEROPE, EURICLES, ISMENIA.

MEROPE.

O Euricles, this vile deteſted marriage,
Whate'er I promis'd, ne'er will come to paſs:
This arm ſhall pierce the ſavage murth'rer's breaſt,
And inſtant turn the dagger to my own.

EROX.

O! madam, let me by the gods conjure you —

MEROPE.

They have oppreſs'd me ſorely; I have been
Too long the object of their wrath divine:
They have depriv'd me of my deareſt child,
And at their altars ſhall I aſk a huſband?
Shall I conduct a ſtranger to the throne
Of my forefathers? woud'ſt thou have me join
The Hymeneal to the fun'ral torch?
Shall Merope ſtill raiſe her weeping eyes
To heav'n, that ſhines no more on my Ægiſthus?
Shall ſhe wear out her melancholy days
Beneath a hateful tyrant, and expect
In tears and anguiſh an old age of ſorrow?
When all is loſt, and not ev'n hope remains,
To live, is ſhameful, and to die, our duty.

End of the Second Act.

ACT III. SCENE I.

NARBAS.

O grief! O horror! O the weight of age!
The youthful hero's warm imprudent ardor
Was not to be reſtrain'd; his courage burſt
Th' inglorious chains of vile obſcurity,

And

And he is loſt to me, perhaps for ever.
How ſhall I dare to ſee my royal miſtreſs!
Unhappy Narbas! hither art thou come
Without Ægiſthus; Poliphontes reigns,
That ſubtle proud artificer of fraud,
That ſavage murth'rer, who purſued us ſtill
From clime to clime, and laid the ſnares of death
On ev'ry ſide, fix'd on the ſacred throne,
Which by his crimes ſo oft he hath profan'd,
The proud uſurper ſits, and ſmiles ſecure:
Hide me, ye gods, from his all-piercing eye,
And ſave Ægiſthus from the tyrant's ſword:
O guide me, heav'n, to his unhappy mother,
And let me periſh at her feet! once more
I ſee the palace, where the beſt of kings
Was baſely ſlain, and his defenceleſs child
Sav'd in theſe arms; and after fifteen years
Shall I return to fill a mother's heart
With anguiſh? who will lead me to the queen?
No friend appears to guide me: but behold,
Near yonder tomb I ſee a weeping croud,
And hear their loud laments! within theſe walls
For ever dwells ſome perſecuting god.

SCENE.

SCENE II.

NARBAS, ISMENIA, at the further end of the several of the queen's attendants, near the tomb of Cresphon

ISMENIA.

What bold intruder presses thus unknown
To the queen's presence, and disturbs the peace
Of her retirement? comes he from the tyrant
A spy upon our griefs, to count the tears
Of the afflicted?

NARBAS.

Who soe'er thou art,
Excuse the boldness of a poor old man;
Forgive th' intrusion; I wou'd see the queen,
Perhaps may serve her.

ISMENIA.

What a time is this
Which thou hast chos'n to interrupt her griefs!
Respect a mother's bitter sorrow's; hence,
Unhappy stranger, nor offend her sight.

NARBAS.

O, in the name of the avenging gods,
Have pity on my age, my misfortunes:
I am no stranger here: O, if you serve
And love the queen, forgive the tears that long
Have flow'd for her, and trust a heart that feels
For Merope as deeply as thy own.

What tomb is that where you ſo late did join
Your griefs?

ISMENIA.

The tomb of an illuſtrious hero,
A wretched father, and a hapleſs king,
The tomb of great Creſphontes.

NARBAS. [Going towards the tomb.

My lov'd maſter!
Ye honour'd aſhes!

ISMENIA.

But Creſphontes' wife
Is more to be lamented ſtill.

NARBAS.

What worſe
Cou'd happen to her?

ISMENIA.

A moſt dreadful ſtroke;
Her ſon is ſlain.

NARBAS.

Her ſon! Ægiſthus! gods!
And is Ægiſthus dead?

ISMENIA.

All know it here
Too well.

NARBAS.

Her ſon?

ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

A barbarous aſſaſſin
Did ſlay him at Meſſene's gates.

NARBAS.

O death,
I did foretel thee: horror and deſpair!
Is the queen ſure, and art thou not deceiv'd?

ISMENIA.

O 'tis too plain; we have undoubted proofs;
It muſt be ſo: he is no more.

NARBAS.

Is this
The fruit of all my care?

ISMENIA.

The wretched queen,
Abandon'd to deſpair, will ſcarce ſurvive him:
She liv'd but for her child, and now the ties
Are loos'd that bound her to this hated life:
But, e'er ſhe dies, with her own hand ſhe waits
To pierce the murth'rer's heart, and be reveng'd;
Ev'n at Creſphontes' tomb his blood ſhall flow.
Soon will the victim, by the king's permiſſion,
Be hither brought, to periſh at her feet:
But Merope is loſt in grief, and therefore
Wou'd wiſh to be alone: you muſt retire.

NARBAS.

NARBAS.

If it be ſo, why ſhou'd I ſeek the queen?
I will but viſit yonder tomb, and die.

SCENE III.

ISMENIA. [Alone.

This old man ſeems moſt worthy: how he wept!
Whilſt the unfeeling ſlaves around us ſeem,
Like their proud maſter, but to mock our ſorrows:
What int'reſt cou'd he have? yet tranquil pity
Doth ſeldom ſhed ſo many tears; methought
He mourn'd the loſt Ægiſthus like a father:
He muſt be ſought — but here's a dreadful ſight.

SCENE IV.

MEROPE, ISMENIA, EURICLES, ÆGISTHUS in chains, guards, ſacrificers.

MEROPE. [Near the tomb.

Bring forth that horrid victim to my ſight;
I muſt invent ſome new unheard of torment,
That may be equal to his crime; alas!
Not to my grief, that were impoſſible.

ÆGISTHUS.

Dear have I bought thy momentary kindneſs,
Guardians of innocence, protect me now!

EURICLES.

EURICLES.

Before the traitor ſuffers, let him name
His vile accomplices.

MEROPE. [Coming forward.

He muſt; he ſhall:
Say, monſter, what induc'd thee to a crime
So horrible to nature! how had I
E'er injur'd thee?

ÆGISTHUS.

Now bear me witneſs, gods,
You who revenge the perjuries of men,
If e'er my lips knew fraud or baſe impoſture;
I told thee nought but ſimple truth; thy heart,
Fierce as it was, relented at my tale,
And you ſtretch'd forth a kind protecting hand;
So ſoon is juſtice weary of her taſk?
Unweeting I have ſhed ſome precious blood:
Whoſe was it, tell me, what new int'reſt ſways thee?

MEROPE.

What intereſt? barbarian!

ÆGISTHUS.

O'er her cheek
A deadly paleneſs ſpreads: it wounds my ſoul
To ſee her thus. O I wou'd ſpill my blood
A thouſand times to ſave her.

MEROPE

MEROPE.

Subtle villain!

How artfully diſſembled is that grief!
He kills me, and yet ſeems to weep my fate.

[She falls back into the arms of Iſmenia.

EURICLES.

Madam, revenge yourſelf, revenge the laws,
The cauſe of nature, and the blood of kings.

ÆGISTHUS.

Is this the royal juſtice of a court?
Ye praiſe and flatter firſt, and then condemn me.
Why did I leave my peaceful ſolitude!
O good old man, what will thy ſorrows be,
And thou, unhappy mother, whoſe dear voice
So oft foretold ——

MEROPE.

Barbarian, and haſt thou
A mother? I had been a mother yet
But for thy rage, thou haſt deſtroy'd my ſon.

ÆGISTHUS.

If I am thus unhappy, if he was
Indeed thy ſon, I ought to ſuffer for it;
But though my hand was guilty, yet my heart
Was innocent: heav'n knows I wou'd have giv'n
This day my life to ſave or his or thine.

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

Did'ſt thou take this armour from him?

ÆGISTHUS.

No:
It is my own.

MEROPE.

What ſay'ſt thou?

ÆGISTHUS.

Yes; I ſwear
By thee, by him, by all thy anceſtors,
My father gave to me that precious gift.

MEROPE.

Thy father! where? in Elis: how he moves me!
What was his name? ſpeak, anſwer.

ÆGISTHUS.

Polycletes:
I've told thee ſo already.

MEROPE.

O thou riv'ſt
My heart: what fooliſh pity ſtopp'd my vengeance?
It is too much: aſſiſt me, friends, bring here
The monſter, the perfidious ——

[Lifting up the dagger.

O ye manes
Of my dear ſon, this bloody arm ——

NARBAS.

NARBAS. [Entering on a ſudden.

O gods!

t woud'ſt thou do?

MEROPE.

Who calls?

NARBAS.

Stop: ſtop — alas!

ut name his mother, he's undone

MEROPE.

traitor.

NARBAS.

Stop.

ÆGISTHUS. [Turning towards Narbas.

My father!

MEROPE.

Ha! his father!

ÆGISTHUS. [To Narbas.

t do I ſee? and whither wert thou going?
ſt thou to be a witneſs of my death?

NARBAS.

adam, go no further: Euricles,
ve the victim, let me ſpeak to thee.

EURICLES.

s away Ægiſthus, and ſhuts up the lower part of the ſcene.]
v'n!

MEROPE.

MEROPE. [Coming forward.

Thou mak'ſt me tremble; I was going
T'avenge my ſon.

NARBAS. [Kneeling down.

To ſacrifice — Ægiſthus.

MEROPE.

Ægiſthus! ha!

NARBAS.

'Twas he, whom thy raſh arm
Had well nigh ſlain; believe me, 'twas Ægiſthus.

MEROPE.

And lives he then?

NARBAS.

'Tis he, it is your ſon.

MEROPE, [Fainting away in the arms of Iſmenia.

I die!

ISMENIA.

Good heav'n!

NARBAS. [To Iſmenia.

Recall her fleeting ſpirits;
This ſudden tranſport of tumultuous joy,
Mix'd with anxiety and tender fears,
May quite o'erpow'r her.

MEROPE. [Coming to herſelf.

Narbas, is it you?
Or do I dream? is it my ſon? where is he?
Let him come hither.

NARBAS.

NARBAS.

No: refrain your love,
Reſtrain your tenderneſs.
[To Iſmenia.
O keep the ſecret;
The ſafety of the queen, and of Ægiſthus,
Depend on that.

MEROPE.

Alas! and muſt freſh danger
Embitter my new joys? O dear Ægiſthus,
What cruel god ſtill keeps thee from thy mother?
Was he reſtor'd but to afflict me more?

NARBAS.

You knew him not, and wou'd have ſlain your ſon:
If his arrival here be once diſcover'd,
And you acknowledge him, he's loſt for ever.
Diſſemble therefore, for thou know'ſt that guilt
Reigns in Meſſene: thou art watch'd; be cautious.

SCENE V.

MEROPE, EURICLES, NARBAS, ISMENIA.

EURICLES.

'Tis the king's order, madam, that we ſeize ——

MEROPE.

Whom?

EURICLES.

EURICLES.

The young ſtranger, whom thou had'ſt condemn'd
To death.

MEROPE, [With tranſport.

That ſtranger is my child, my ſon:
They wou'd deſtroy him, Narbas, let us fly ——

NARBAS.

No: ſtay.

MEROPE.

It is my ſon; they'll have him from me.
My dear Ægiſthus: why is this?

EURICLES.

The king
Wou'd queſtion him before he dies.

MEROPE.

Indeed!
And knows he then I am his mother?

EURICLES.

No:
'Tis yet a ſecret to them all.

MEROPE.

W'ell fly
To Poliphontes, and implore his aid.

NARBAS.

Fear Poliphontes, and implore the gods.

EURICLES.

EURICLES.

Howe'er Ægiſthus may alarm the tyrant,
Thy promis'd nuptials make his pardon ſure:
Bound to each other in eternal bonds,
Thy ſon will ſoon be his; though jealouſy
May now ſubſiſt, it muſt be loſt in love
When he's your huſband.

NARBAS.

He your huſband, gods!
I'm thunder ſtruck.

MEROPE.

I will no longer bear
Such anguiſh, let me hence.

NARBAS.

Thou ſhalt not go:
Unhappy mother! thou ſhalt ne'er ſubmit
To theſe deteſted nuptials.

EURICLES.

She is forc'd
To wed him, that ſhe may revenge Creſphontes.

NARBAS.

He was his murth'rer.

MEROPE.

He! that traitor!

NARBAS.

Yes:
By Poliphontes thy Ægiſthus fell,

His father, and his brothers: I beheld
The tyrant welt'ring in Creſphontes' blood.

MEROPE.

O gods!

NARBAS.

I ſaw him glorying in his Crimes;
Saw him admit the foe, and through the palace
Spread fire and ſlaughter; yet appear'd to thoſe
Who knew him not th'avenger of that king
Whom he had ſlain: I pierc'd the ſavage croud,
And in my feeble arms uprais'd your ſon,
And bore him thence; the pitiying gods protected
His helpleſs innocence: theſe ſixteen years,
From place to place I led him, chang'd my name
To Polycletes, hid him from the foe,
And now at laſt it ſeems have brought him hither,
To ſee a tyrant on Meſſene's throne,
And Merope the wife of Poliphontes.

MEROPE.

Thy tale has harrow'd up my ſoul.

EURICLES.

He comes:
'Tis Poliphontes.

MEROPE.

Is it poſſible?

Away, good Narbas, hide thee from his rage.

NARBAS.

Now, if Ægiſthus e'er was dear to thee,
Diſſemble with the tyrant

EURICLES.

We muſt hide
This ſecret in the bottom of our hearts,
A word may ruin all.

MEROPE. [To Euricles.

Go thou and guard
That precious treaſure well.

EURICLES.

O doubt it not.

MEROPE.

My hopes depend on thee: he is my ſon
Remember, and thy king.—The monſter comes.

SCENE VI.

MEROPE, POLIPHONTES, EROX, ISMENIA, Attendants.

POLIPHONTES.

The altar is prepar'd, the throne awaits you,
Our int'reſts ſoon will with our hearts be join'd:

As king, and huſband, 'tis my duty now
Both to defend and to revenge you, madam:
Two of the traitors I have ſeiz'd already,
Who ſhall repay the murther with their blood:
But, ſpite of all my care, thy tardy vengeance
Hath ſeconded but ill my purpoſes:
You told me you wou'd wiſh yourſelf to ſlay
The murthr'er, and I gave him to your juſtice.

MEROPE.

O that I might be my own great avenger!

POLIPHONTES.

'Tis a king's duty, and ſhall be my care.

MEROPE.

Thine, ſaid'ſt thou?

POLIPHONTES.

Wherefore is the ſacrifice
Delay'd? doſt thou no longer love thy ſon?

MEROPE.

May all his foes meet with their due reward!
But if this murth'rer has accomplices,
By him perhaps I may hereafter learn
Who kill'd my dear Creſphontes: they who ſlew
The father wou'd for ever perſecute
The mother and the ſon: O if I e'er ——

POLI-

POLIPHONTES.

I too cou'd wiſh to be inform'd of that,
And therefore I have ta'en him to my care.

MEROPE.

To thine?

POLIPHONTES.

Yes, madam, and I hope to draw
The ſecret from him.

MEROPE.

But you muſt not keep
This murth'rer: I muſt have him; nay, you promis'd,
You know you did ——

[Aſide.

O cruel fate! my ſon!
What art thou doom'd to?

[To Poliphontes.

Pity me, my lord!

POLIPHONTES.

Whence is this ſudden tranſport? he ſhall die.

MEROPE.

Who? he?

POLIPHONTES.

His death ſhall ſatisfy thy ſoul.

MEROPE.

Ay: but I want to ſee, to ſpeak to him.

POLIPHONTES.

Theſe ſtarts of paſſion, and theſe ſudden tranſports
Of rage and tenderneſs, that face of horror,
Might give me cauſe perhaps of juſt ſuſpicion;
And, to be plain with you, ſome ſtrange diſguſt,
Some groundleſs fears, ſome new alarm, hath rais'd
This tempeſt in your ſoul; what have you heard
From that old man who went ſo lately hence?
Why doth he ſhun me? what am I to think?
Who is he?

MEROPE.

O my lord! ſo lately crown'd
Do fears and jealouſies already wait
Around your throne?

POLIPHONTES.

Why wilt not thou partake it?
Then ſhou'd I bid adieu to all my fears:
The altar waits, prepar'd for Merope
And Poliphontes.

MEROPE.

Thou haſt gain'd the throne,
The gods have giv'n it thee, and now thou want'ſt
Creſphontes' wife to make his kingdom ſure,
This crime alone ——

ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

O ſtop ——

MEROPE.

My lord, forgive me;
I am a wretched mother; I have loſt
My all; the gods, the cruel gods have robb'd me
Of ev'ry bliſs: O give me, give me back
The murth'rer of my ſon!

POLIPHONTES.

This hand ſhall ſhed
The traitors blood: come, madam, follow me.

MEROPE.

O gracious heav'n! in pity to my woes,
Preſerve a mother, and conceal her weakneſs!

End of the Third Act.

ACT IV. SCENE I.

POLIPHONTES, EROX.

POLIPHONTES.

I ALMOST thought ſhe had diſcover'd ſomething
Touching her huſband's murther, for ſhe frown'd
Indignant on me; but I want her hand,

And not her heart; the croud will have it ſo;
We muſt not diſoblige them; by this marriage
I ſhall ſecure them both: I look on her
But as a ſlave that's uſeful to my purpoſe,
Chain'd to my chariot wheels to grace my triumph,
And little heed her hatred or her love.
But thou haſt talk'd to this young murtherer,
What think'ſt thou of him?

EROX.

He's immoveable,
Simple in ſpeech, but of undaunted courage,
He braves his fate: I little thought to find
In one of his low birth a ſoul ſo great;
I own, my lord, I cannot but admire him.

POLIPHONTES.

Who is he?

EROX.

That I know not; but moſt certain
He is not one of thoſe whom we employ'd
To watch for Narbas.

POLIPHONTES.

Art thou ſure of that?
The leader of that band I have myſelf
Diſpatch'd, and prudent bury'd in his blood
The dang'rous ſecret; but this young unknown

Alar

Alarms me: is it certain he deſtroy'd
Ægiſthus? has propitious fate, that ſtill
Prevented all my wiſhes, been thus kind?

EROX.

Merope's tears, her ſorrow, and deſpair,
Are the beſt proofs; but all I ſee confirms
Thy happineſs, and fortune hath done more
Than all our cares.

POLIPHONTES.

Fortune doth often reach
What wiſdom cannot: but I know too well
My danger, and the number of my foes,
To leave that fortune to decide my fate:
Whoe'er this ſtranger be, he muſt not live,
His death ſhall purchaſe me this haughty queen,
And make the crown ſit firmer on my head.
The people then, ſubjected to my pow'r,
Will think at leaſt their prince is dead, and know
That I reveng'd him: but, inform me, who
Is this old man that ſhuns me thus? there ſeems
Some myſt'ry in his conduct; Merope,
Thou tell'ſt me, wou'd have ſlain the murtherer,
But that this old man did prevent her; what
Cou'd move him to it?

EROX.

He's the young man's father
And came t'implore his pardon.

POLIPHONTES.

Ha! his pardon!
I'll ſee, and talk with him; but he avoids me,
And therefore I ſuſpect him; but I'll know
This ſecret: what cou'd be the queen's ſtrange purpoſe,
In thus deferring what ſo ardently
She ſeem'd to wiſh for? all her rage was chang'd
To tend'reſt pity; through her griefs methought
A ray of joy broke forth.

EROX.

What is her joy,
Her pity, or her vengeance, now to thee?

POLIPHONTES.

It doth concern me nearly; I have cauſe
For many fears; but ſhe approaches: — bring
That ſtranger to me.

SCENE

SCENE II.

POLIPHONTES, EROX, ÆGISTHUS, EURICLES, MEROPE, ISMENIA, Guards.

MEROPE.

Fulfil your word, ſir, and revenge me; give
The victim to my hands, and mine alone.

POLIPHONTES.

You ſee I mean to keep it: he's before you:
Revenge yourſelf, and ſhed the traitors blood;
Then, madam, with your leave, we'll to the altar.

MEROPE.

O gods!

ÆGISTHUS. [To Poliphontes.

Am I then to be made the purchaſe
Of the queen's favour? my poor life indeed
Is but of little moment, and I die
Contented; but I am a ſtranger here,
A helpleſs, innocent, unhappy ſtranger;
If heav'n has made thee king, thou ſhou'd'ſt protect me:
Iv'e ſlain a man, 'twas in my own defence;
The queen demands my life; ſhe is a mother,
Therefore I pity her, and bleſs the hand
Rais'd to deſtroy me: I accuſe none here
But thee, thou tyrant.

POLI-

POLIPHONTES.

Hence, abandon'd villain;
Dar'ſt thou inſult —

MEROPE.

O pardon his raſh youth,
Brought up in ſolitude, and far remov'd
From courts, he knows not the reſpect that's due
To majeſty.

POLIPHONTES.

Amazing! juſtify'd
By you!

MEROPE.

By me, my lord?

POLIPHONTES.

Yes, madam, you.
Is this the murth'rer of your ſon?

MEROPE.

My child,
My ſon, the laſt of a long line of kings,
Beneath a vile aſſaſſin's hand ——

ISMENIA.

O heav'n!
What woud'ſt thou do?

POLIPHONTES.

Thy eyes are fix'd upon him
With tenderneſs and joy; thy tears too flow,
Though thou woud'ſt hide them from me.

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

No: 'tis falſe:
I wou'd not, cannot hide them: well thou know'ſt
I've too much cauſe to weep.

POLIPHONTES.

Dry up your tears;
He dies this moment: ſoldiers, do your office.

MEROPE. [Coming forward.

O ſpare him, ſpare him.

ÆGISTHUS.

Ha! ſhe pity's me.

POLIPHONTES.

Diſpatch him.

MEROPE.

O he is ——

POLIPHONTES.

Strike.

MEROPE.

Stay, barbarian,
He is — my ſon.

ÆGISTHUS.

Am I thy ſon?

MEROPE. [Embracing him.

Thou art:
And heav'n, that ſnatch'd thee from this wretched bo-
ſom,

Which

Which now too late hath open'd my longing eyes,
Reſtores thee to a weeping mother's arms
But to deſtroy us both.

ÆGISTHUS.

What miracle
Is this, ye gods?

POLIPHONTES.

A vile impoſture: thou
His mother? thou, who did'ſt demand his death?

ÆGISTHUS.

O if I die the ſon of Merope
I die contented, and abſolve my fate.

MEROPE.

I am thy mother, and my love of thee
Betray'd us both; we are undone, Ægiſthus;
Yes, Poliphontes, the important ſecret
At length is thine; before thee ſtands my ſon,
Creſphontes' heir; thy maſter, and thy king;
The offspring of the gods, thy captive now;
I have deceiv'd thee, and I glory in it;
'Twas for my child: but nature has no pow'r
O'er tyrant's hearts, that ſtill rejoice in blood:
I tell thee, 'tis my ſon, 'tis my Ægiſthus.

POLIPHONTES.

Ha! can it be?

ÆGISTHUS

ÆGISTHUS.

It is; it muſt be ſo;
Her tears confirm it: yes, I am the ſon
Of Merope, my heart aſſures me of it:
And, had'ſt thou not diſarm'd me, with this hand
I wou'd chaſtiſe thee, traitor.

POLIPHONTES.

'Tis too much;
I'll bear no more: away with him.

MEROPE. [Falling on her knees.

Behold
Thus low on earth the wretched Merope
Falls at your feet, and bathes them with her tears:
Doth not this humble poſture ſpeak my griefs,
And ſay I am a mother? O I tremble
When I look back on the dire precipice
I have eſcap'd, the murther of my ſon;
Still I lament th' involuntary crime.
Did'ſt thou not ſay thou woud'ſt protect his youth,
And be a father to him? and yet now
Thou woud'ſt deſtroy him: O have pity on him:
Some guilty hand bereav'd him of a father;
O ſave the ſon, defend the royal race,
The ſeed of gods: defenceleſs and alone
He ſtands before thee: trample not on him,
Who is unable to reſiſt thy pow'r;

Let

Let him but live, and I am ſatisfy'd;
Save but my child, and all ſhall be forgotten:
O he wou'd make me happy ev'n in woe;
My huſband and my children all wou'd live.
Once more in my Ægiſthus: O behold
His royal anceſtors with me implore thee
To ſpare the noble youth, and ſave thy king.

ÆGISTHUS.

Riſe, madam, riſe, or I ſhall ne'er believe
Creſphontes was my father; 'tis beneath
His queen, beneath the mother of Ægiſthus,
To ſupplicate a tyrant; my fierce heart
Will never ſtoop ſo low: undaunted long
I braved the meanneſs of my former fortune,
Nor am I dazzled by the ſplendid luſtre
Of theſe new honours; but I feel myſelf
Of royal blood, and know I am thy ſon.
Great Hercules, like me, began his days
In miſery and ſorrow; but the gods
Conducted him to immortality,
Becauſe, like me, he roſe ſuperior to them:
To me his blood deſcends; O let me add
His courage, and his virtues; let me die
Worthy of thee; be that my heritage!

Ceaſ

Ceaſe then thy pray'rs, nor thus diſgrace the blood
Of thoſe immortal pow'rs from whom I ſprang.

POLIPHONTES. [To Merope.

Truſt me, I bear a part in your misfortunes,
Feel for your griefs, and pity your diſtreſs;
I love his courage, and eſteem his virtue;
He ſeems well worthy of the royal birth
Which he aſſumes; but truths of ſuch importance
Demand more ample proofs; I take him therefore
Beneath my care, and, if he is thy ſon,
I ſhall adopt him mine.

ÆGISTHUS.

Thou, thou adopt me?

MEROPE.

Alas! my child!

POLIPHONTES.

His fate depends on thee:
It is not long ſince, to ſecure his death,
Thou did'ſt conſent to marry Poliphontes;
Now thou woud'ſt ſave him, ſhall not love do more
Than vengeance?

MEROPE.

Ha! barbarian!

POLI-

POLIPHONTES.

Madam, know
His life, or death, depends on thy reſolve:
I know your love, your tenderneſs, too well,
To think you will expoſe to my juſt wrath
So dear an object by a harſh refuſal.

MEROPE.

My lord, at leaſt let him be free, and deign —

POLIPHONTES.

He is your ſon, or he's a traitor, madam;
I muſt be your's before I can protect him,
Or be reveng'd on both; a word from you
Decides his fate, or puniſhment, or pardon;
Or as his mother I ſhall look upon you
Or his accomplice; therefore make your choice:
I will receive your anſwer at the temple
Before th'atteſting gods.

[To the ſoldiers.

Guard well your priſ'ner:
Come, follow me:

[Turning to Merope.

I ſhall expect you, madam;
Be quick in your reſolve; confirm his birth
By giving me your hand; your anſwer only
Saves or condems him; and as you determine
He is my victim, madam, or — my ſon.

MEROPE.

MEROPE.

O grant me but the pleaſure to behold him;
Reſtore him to my love, to my deſpair.

POLIPHONTES.

You'll ſee him at the temple.

ÆGISTHUS. [As the guards are carrying him off.

O great queen,
I dare not call thee by the ſacred name
Of mother, do not, I beſeech thee, aught
Unworthy of thyſelf, or of Ægiſthus;
For, if I am thy ſon, thy ſon ſhall die
As a king ought.

SCENE III.

MEROPE. [Alone.

Ye cruel ſpoilers, why
Will you thus tear him from me? O he's gone,
I've loſt him now for ever; wherefore, heav'n,
Didſt thou reſtore him to a mother's vows,
Or why preſerve him in a foreign land,
To fall at laſt a wretched ſacrifice,
A victim to the murth'rer of his father?
O ſave him, hide him in the deſart's gloom;
Direct his ſteps, and ſhield him from the tyrant!

SCENE

SCENE IV.

MEROPE, NARBAS, EURICLES.

MEROPE.

O Narbas, know'ſt thou the unhappy fate
Which I am doom'd to?

NARBAS.

Well I know the king
Muſt die; I know Ægiſthus is in chains.

MEROPE.

And I deſtroy'd him.

NARBAS.

You?

MEROPE.

Diſcover'd all:
But think'ſt thou, Narbas, ever mother yet
Cou'd ſee a child, as I did, and be ſilent?
But it is paſt: and now I muſt repair
My weakneſs with my crimes.

NARBAS.

What crimes?

SCENE V.

MEROPE, NARBAS, EURICLES, ISMENIA.

ISMENIA.

O madam,
Now call forth all the vigour of your ſoul,

The

The hour of trial comes: the fickle croud,
Still fond of novelty, with ardent zeal,
Preſs forward to behold th'expected nuptials;
Each circumſtance conſpires to ſerve the tyrant:
Already the bribed prieſt has made his god
Declare for Poliphontes: he receiv'd.
Your vows, Meſſene was a witneſs to them,
And heav'n will ſee the contract is fulfill'd:
Thus ſpoke the holy ſeer; the people anſwer'd
With acclamations loud, and ſongs of joy;
They little know the grief that wrings thy heart;
But thank the gods for theſe deteſted nuptials,
And bleſs the tyrant for his cruelty.

MEROPE.

And are my ſorrows made the public joy?

NARBAS.

O theſe are dreadful means to ſave thy ſon.

MEROPE.

They are indeed: thou ſhudder'ſt at the thought:
It is a crime.

NARBAS.

But to deſtroy thy child
Were ſtill more horrible.

MEROPE.

Away: deſpair
Has giv'n me courage, and reſtor'd my virtue:

Let's

Let's to the temple; there I'll ſhew the people
My dear Ægiſthus; 'twixt myſelf and th'altar
Will place my ſon; the gods will ſee him there;
They will defend him, for from them he ſprang:
Too long already perſecuting heav'n
Hath ſcourg'd his helpleſs innocence; and now
It will avenge him: O I will ſet forth
His ſavage murth'rer in the blackeſt colours,
Till vengeance ſhall inſpire each honeſt heart
With tenfold rage: now dread a mother's cries,
Ye cruel tyrants, for they will be heard:
They come; alas! I tremble yet, deſpair
And horror ſeize me: hark, they call, my ſon
Is dying: ſee the cruel murth'rer plants
A dagger in his breaſt: a moment more
And he is loſt: ye ſavage miniſters

[Turning to the ſacrificers.

Of the baſe tyrant, you muſt drag the victim
Up to the altar; can you, muſt you do it?
O vengeance, duty, tenderneſs, and love,
And thou great nature, what will ye ordain,
What will ye do with an unhappy queen,
Abandon'd to deſpair?

END of the FOURTH ACT.

ACT V. SCENE I.

ÆGISTHUS, NARBAS, EURICLES.

NARBAS.

OUR fate is yet uncertain, whilſt the tyrant
Still keeps us in the palace; all my fears
Are for Ægiſthus: O my king, my ſon,
Let me ſtill call thee by that tender name,
O live, diſarm the tyrant's rage, preſerve
A life ſo dear, ſo precious to Meſſene,
So valued by thy faithful Narbas!

EURICLES.

Think
On the poor queen, who, for thy ſake alone
An humble ſuppliant, ſprinkles with her tears
The tyrant's murth'rous hand.

ÆGISTHUS.

I'm ſcarce awaken'd
From my long dream, I ſeem as one new-born;
A wand'ring ſtranger in a world unknown;
New thoughts inſpire, new day breaks in upon me;
The ſon of Merope, and great Creſphontes;
And yet his murth'rer triumphs; he commands,
And I obey; the blood of Hercules
A captive and in chains!

NARBAS.

NARBAS.

O wou'd to heav'n
The grandſon of Alcides ſtill remain'd
Unknown in Elis!

ÆGISTHUS.

Is it not moſt ſtrange,
Young as I am, that I ſhou'd know already,
By ſad experience, ev'ry human woe?
Horror and ſhame, and baniſhment, and death,
Since my firſt dawn of life, have preſs'd upon me:
A perſecuted wretch I wander'd long
From clime to clime, hid in the deſart's gloom,
I languiſh'd there in vile obſcurity:
Yet, bear me witneſs heav'n, mid'ſt all my woes,
Nor murmur'd nor complain'd: tho' proud ambition
Devour'd my ſoul, I learn'd the humble virtues
That ſuited beſt my hard and low condition:
Still I reſpected, ſtill obey'd thee, Narbas,
And lov'd thee as a father; nor wou'd e'er
Have wiſh'd to find another, but high heav'n
Wou'd change my fate to make me but more wretched:
I am Creſphontes' ſon, yet can't revenge him;
I've found a mother, and a tyrant now
Will ſnatch her from me; ſoon ſhe muſt be his:
O I cou'd curſe the hour that gave me birth,
And the kind ſuccour which thy goodneſs lent me:

O

O why didſt thou hold back th'uplifted hand
Of a miſtaken mother? But for thee
I had fulfill'd my fate, and all my woes
Had ended with my life.

NARBAS.

We are undone,
The tyrant comes.

SCENE II.

POLIPHONTES, ÆGISTHUS, NARBAS, EURICLES, Guards.

POLIPHONTES.

[To Narbas and the reſt.

Retire: and thou, raſh youth,
Whoſe tender years demand my pity, liſt,
And mark me well; for the laſt time I come
To give thee here thy choice of life or death,
Thy preſent and thy future happineſs,
Thy very being hangs upon my will:
I can advance thee to the higheſt rank,
Or ſhut thee in a dungeon, kill or ſave thee:
Remov'd from courts, and bred in ſolitude,
Thou art not fit to govern; let me guide
In wiſdom's ways thy unexperienc'd youth;
Aſſume not in thy humble ſtate a pride
Which thou miſtak'ſt for virtue: if thy birth

Be mean and lowly, bend to thy condition;
If happier fate hath giv'n thee to deſcend
From royal blood, and thou wert born a prince,
Make thyſelf worthy of thy noble rank,
And learn of me to rule: the queen, thou ſee'ſt,
Has ſet thee an example; ſhe obeys,
And meets me at the temple; follow her,
Tread in my ſteps, attend us to the altar,
And ſwear eternal homage to thy king,
To Poliphontes: if thou fear'ſt the gods,
Call them to witneſs thy obedience; haſte,
The gates of glory open to receive,
And not to enter may be fatal to thee:
Determine therefore now, and anſwer me.

ÆGISTHUS.

How can I anſwer when thou haſt diſarm'd me?
Thy words, I own, aſtoniſh and confound;
But give me back that weapon which thy fears
Have wreſted from me; give me my good ſword,
And I will anſwer as I ought; will ſhew thee,
Perfidious as thou art, which is the ſlave,
And which the maſter, whether Poliphontes
Was born to rule o'er princes, or Ægiſthus
To ſcourge oppreſſors.

POLIPHONTES.

Impotence and raſhneſs!
My kind indulgence makes thee inſolent:
Thou think'ſt I'll not demean myſelf ſo far
To puniſh an unknown rebellious ſlave;
But mercy, thus abuſed, will change to wrath:
I give thee but a moment to determine,
And ſhall expect thee at the altar; there
To die or to obey: guards, bring him to me:
Narbas, to you and Euricles I leave
The haughty rebel; you ſhall anſwer for him:
I know your hatred of me, and I know
Your weakneſs too, but truſt to your experience,
You will adviſe him for the beſt; mean time
Remember, whether he's the ſon of Narbas
Or Merope, he muſt obey, or die.

SCENE III.

ÆGISTHUS, NARBAS, EURICLES.

ÆGISTHUS.

I'll liſten to no counſel but the voice
Of vengeance; O inſpire me, Hercules,
O from thy ſeats of endleſs bliſs look down
On thy Ægiſthus, animate his ſoul,

And guide his footſteps! Poliphontes calls,
I will attend him; let us to the altar.

NARBAS.

Wilt thou then die?

EURICLES.

We muſt not follow thee:
Let us collect our few remaining friends,
And ſtrive ———

ÆGISTHUS.

Away: another time my ſoul
Wou'd liſten to your kind advice, for well
I know ye love me; but no counſellors
Muſt now be heard ſave all-directing heav'n
And my own heart: th' irreſolute alone
Is ſway'd by others, but the blood of heroes
Will guide itſelf: away, the die is caſt.
What do I ſee? O gracious heav'n! my mother!

SCENE. IV.

MEROPE, ÆGISTHUS, NARBAS, EURICLES, Attendants.

MEROPE.

Once more, Ægiſthus, by the tyrant's order,
We meet together; he has ſent me to thee:
Think not that, after theſe deteſted nuptials,
I mean to live; but for thy ſake, my ſon,

I have ſubmitted to this ſhameful bondage:
For thee alone I fear; for thee I bear
This load of infamy: O live, Ægiſthus,
Let me intreat thee, live; e'er thou can'ſt rule
Thou muſt obey, and ſervitude muſt open
The path to vengeance; thou contemn'ſt my weakneſs,
I know thou doſt; but O the more I love
The more I fear. O my dear child —

ÆGISTHUS.

Be bold,
And follow me.

MEROPE.

Alas! what woud'ſt thou do?
Why, ye juſt gods, why was he made too virtuous?

ÆGISTHUS.

See'ſt thou my father's tomb? doſt thou not hear
His voice? art thou a mother and a queen?
O if thou art, come on.

MEROPE.

Methinks ſome god
Inſpires thy ſoul, and raiſes the above
The race of mortals: now I ſee the blood
Of great Alcides flows thro' ev'ry vein,
And animates Ægiſthus: O my ſon,

Give me a portion of thy noble fire,
And raiſe this drooping heart!

ÆGISTHUS.

Haſt thou no friends
Within this fatal temple?

MEROPE.

Once I had
A croud of followers when I was a queen,
But now their virtue ſinks beneath the weight
Of my misfortunes, and they bend their necks
To this new yoke: they hate the tyrant, yet
Have crown'd him; love their queen, and yet deſert her.

ÆGISTHUS.

By all art thou abandon'd; at the altar
Waits Poliphontes for thee?

MEROPE.

Yes.

ÆGISTHUS.

His ſoldiers,
Do they attend him?

MEROPE.

No: he is ſurrounded
By that ungrateful faithleſs croud that once
Encircled Merope, by them upled
To th' altar I will force for thee alone
A paſſage.

ÆGISTHUS.

ÆGISTHUS.

And alone I'll follow thee:
There ſhall I meet my anceſtors divine:
The gods who puniſh murth'rers will be there.

MEROPE.

Alas! theſe fifteen years they have contemn'd thee.

ÆGISTHUS.

They did it but to try me.

MEROPE.

What's thy purpoſe?

ÆGISTHUS.

No matter what; let us begone: farewell
My mournful friends, at leaſt ye ſoon ſhall know
The ſon of Merope deſerv'd your care.
[To Narbas, embracing him.
Narbas, believe me, thou ſhalt never bluſh
To own me for thy ſon.

SCENE V.

NARBAS.

What means Ægiſthus?
Alas! my cares are fruitleſs all and vain:
I hoped the ſure ſlow-moving hand of time
Wou'd juſtify the ways of heav'n, and place

The wrong'd Ægiſthus on Meſſene's throne;
But guilt ſtill triumphs, and my hopes are vaniſh'd;
His courage will deſtroy him; death awaits
His diſobedience.

[A noiſe within.

EURICLES.

Hark! they ſhout.

NARBAS.

Alas!
It is the fatal ſignal.

EURICLES.

Let us liſten.

NARBAS.

I tremble.

EURICLES.

Doubtleſs, at the very moment
When Poliphontes was to wed the queen,
She has diſſolv'd the ſhameful bonds by death,
For ſo her rage had purpos'd.

NARBAS.

Then Ægiſthus
Muſt periſh too, ſhe ſhou'd have liv'd for him.

EURICLES.

The noiſe increaſes, like the rolling thunder
Onward it comes, and ev'ry moment grows
More dreadful.

NARBAS.

NARBAS.

Hark! I hear on ev'ry ſide
The trumpets ſound, the groans of dying men,
And claſh of ſwords; they force the palace.

EURICLES.

See
Yon bloody ſquadron; look, it is diſpers'd;
They fly.

NARBAS.

Perhaps to ſerve the tyrant's cauſe.

EURICLES.

Far as my eyes can reach I ſee them ſtill
Engag'd in fight.

NARBAS.

Whoſe blood will there be ſhed?
Surely I heard the name of Merope,
And of Ægiſthus.

EURICLES.

Thanks to heav'n, the ways
Are open, I will hence, and know my fate.

[He goes out.

NARBAS.

I'll follow thee, but not with equal ſteps,
For I am old and feeble: O ye gods!
Reſtore my ſtrength, give to this nerveleſs arm
Its former vigor; let me ſave my king,

Or yield up the poor remnant of my days,
And die in his defence.

SCENE VI.

NARBAS, ISMENIA. [A croud of people.

NARBAS.

Who's there? Iſmenia?
Bloody and pale! O horrid ſpectacle!
Art thou indeed Iſmenia?

ISMENIA.

O my voice,
My breath is loſt; let me recover them,
And I will tell thee all.

NARBAS.

My ſon—
The queen — do they yet live?

ISMENIA.

I'm ſcarce myſelf;
Half dead with fear; the croud have borne me hither.

NARBAS.

How does Ægiſthus?

ISMENIA.

O he is indeed
The ſon of gods; a ſtroke ſo terrible,
So noble! never did th' unconquer'd courage

Of

Of great Alcides with a deed ſo bold
Aſtoniſh mortals.

NARBAS.

O my ſon, my king,
The work of my own hands, the gallant hero!

ISMENIA.

Crown'd with freſh flow'rs the victim was prepar'd,
And Hymen's torches round the altar blaz'd,
When Poliphontes, wrapp'd in gloomy ſilence,
Stretch forth his eager hand; the prieſt pronounc'd
The ſolemn words; amidſt her weeping maids
Stood fix'd in grief the wretched Merope;
Slow ſhe advanc'd, and trembling in theſe arms,
Inſtead of Hymen, call'd on death; the people
Were ſilent all; when from the holy threſhold,
A more than mortal form, a youthful hero
Stepp'd forth, and ſudden darted to the altar;
It was Ægiſthus; there undaunted ſeiz'd
The axe that for the holy feſtival
Had been prepar'd; then with the light'ning's ſpeed
He ran, and fell'd the tyrant; die, he cry'd,
Uſurper dye; now take your victim, gods.
Erox, the monſter's vile accomplice, ſaw
His maſter welt'ring in his blood, uprais'd
His hand for vengeance; but Ægiſthus ſmote

The

The ſlave, and laid him at the tyrant's feet:
Mean time, recover'd, Poliphontes roſe
And fought; I ſaw Ægiſthus wounded; ſaw
The fierce encounter: the guards ran to part them;
When Merope, ſuch pow'r has mighty love,
Pierc'd thro' oppoſing multitudes, and cry'd,
Stop, ye inhuman murth'rers, 'tis my ſon,
'Tis my Ægiſthus, turn your rage on me,
And plant your daggers in the breaſt of her
Who bore him, of his mother, and your queen:
Her ſhrieks alarm'd the croud, and a firm band
Of faithful friends ſecur'd her from the rage
Of the rude ſoldiers; then might you behold
The broken altars, and the ſacred ruins:
On ev'ry ſide, confuſion, war, and ſlaughter
Triumphant reign'd; brothers on brothers roſe,
Children were butcher'd in their mother arms,
Friends murther'd friends, the dying and the dead
Together lay, and o'er their bodies trampled
The flying croud; with groans the temple rung.
Amidſt the uproar of contending legions
I loſt Ægiſthus and the queen, and fled:
In vain I aſk'd each paſſing ſtranger whither
They bent their way; their anſwers but increaſe
My terrors; ſtill they cry, he falls, he's dead,

He conquers; all is darkneſs and confuſion:
I ran, I flew, and by the timely aid
Of theſe kind friends have reach'd this place of ſafety:
But ſtill I know not whether yet the queen
And great Ægiſthus are preſerv'd; my heart
Is full of terrors.

NARBAS.

Thou great arbiter
Of all that's mortal, providence divine,
Complete thy glorious work, protect the good,
Support the innocent, reward the wretched,
Preſerve my ſon, and I ſhall die in peace!
Ha! midſt yon croud do I behold the queen?

SCENE VII.

MEROPE, ISMENIA, NARBAS, people, ſoldiers.

[At the further part of the ſtage is expos'd the Corpſe of Poliphontes, cover'd with a bloody robe]

MEROPE.

Prieſts, warriors, friends, my fellow-citizens,
Attend, and hear me in the name of heav'n.
Once more I ſwear, Ægiſthus is your king,
The ſcourge of guilt, th'avenger of his father,
And yonder bleeding corpſe, a hated monſter,
The foe of gods and men, who ſlew my huſband,
My dear Creſphontes, and his helpleſs children,

Oppreſs'

Oppreſs'd Meſſene, and uſurp'd my kingdom,
Yet dar'd to offer me his ſavage hand,
Still reeking with the blood of half my race.

[Meeting Ægiſthus, who enters with the axe in his hand.

But here behold Meſſene's royal heir,
My only hope, your queen's illuſtrious ſon,
Who conquer'd Poliphontes: ſee, my friends,
This good old man,

[Pointing to Narbas.

Who ſav'd him from the tyrant,
And brought him here: the gods have done the reſt.

NARBAS.

I call thoſe gods to witneſs, 'tis your king;
He fought for them, and they protected him.

ÆGISTHUS.

O hear a mother pleading for her ſon,
And know me for your king! I have reveng'd
A father, I have conquer'd but for you.

MEROPE.

If ſtill ye doubt, look on his glorious wounds:
Who, but the great deſcendant of Alcides,
Cou'd ſave Meſſene thus, and ſcourge a tyrant?
He will ſupport his ſubjects, and revenge

An

An injur'd people: hark! the voice of heav'n . . . .
Confirms your choice, and ſpeaks to you in thunder;
It cries aloud, Ægiſthus is my ſon.

SCENE VIII.

MEROPE, ÆGISTHUS, ISMENIA, NARBAS, EURICLES, people.

EURICLES.

O madam, ſhew yourſelf to the pleas'd people,
The king's return has fix'd their wav'ring minds,
And ev'ry heart is ours: th'impatient croud
Shed tears of joy, and bleſs your noble ſon:
For ever will they hold this glorious day
In ſweet remembrance; ardently they long
To ſee their youthful ſov'reign, to behold
His faithful Narbas, and adore their queen:
The name of Poliphontes is deteſted;
Thine and the king's the praiſe of ev'ry tongue.
O haſte, enjoy thy vict'ry and thy fame;
Enjoy a nobler prize, thy people's love.

ÆGISTHUS.

To heav'n aſcribe the glory, not to me;
Thence comes our happineſs, and thence our virtue:
Whilſt Merope ſurvives, I will not mount

Meſſene's

Meſſene's throne, my joy ſhall be to place
A mother there; and thou, my deareſt Narbas,
Shall be my friend, my guide, my father ſtill.

END of the FIFTH and LAST ACT.

NANINE

A

COMEDY.

In three Acts.

PREFACE.

THIS trifle was exhibited in the ſummer, 1749, at Paris, amongſt a number of entertainments which every year conſtantly produces in that city: in the ſtill more numerous croud of pamphlets, which the town is over-run with, there appear'd at this time one extremely well worthy of notice, an ingenious and learned diſſertation, by a member of the academy of Rochelle, on a queſtion which ſeems for ſome years paſt to have divided the literary world, namely, whether we ought to write *ſerious comedies?* the author declares vehemently againſt this new ſpecies of the drama, to which, I am afraid, the little comedy of *Nanine* belongs: he condemns, and with reaſon, every thing that carries with it the air of a *city tragedy*: in reality, what can be more ridiculous, than a tragic plot carry'd on by low and vulgar characters? it is demeaning the buſkin, and confounding tragedy and,

comedy

comedy, by a kind of baſtard ſpecies, a monſter, that cou'd only owe its birth to an incapacity of ſucceeding either in one or the other: this judicious writer blames, above all, thoſe romantic forc'd intrigues which are to draw tears from the ſpectators, and which we call, by way of ridicule, the *crying comedy*: but into what ſpecies of comedy ought ſuch intrigues to be admitted? wou'd they not be look'd upon as eſſential and unpardonable faults in any performance whatſoever? He concludes by obſerving, that if, in a comedy, pity may ſometimes go ſo far as to melt into tears, they ſhou'd be ſhed by love alone: he cannot certainly mean by this the paſſion of love as it is repreſented in our beſt tragedies, furious, barbarous, deſtructive, attended with guilt and remorſe; but love gentle and tender, which alone is fit for comedy.

This reflection naturally produces another, which I ſhall ſubmit to the judgment of the learned; *viz.* that amongſt us tragedy has begun by appropriating to itſelf the language of comedy; we may obſerve, that love, in many of thoſe performances where terror and pity ſhou'd be the chief ſprings, is treated as it ought to be treated in comedy. Gallantry, declarations of love, coquettry, archneſs and familiarity, are all to be met with amongſt the heroes and heroines of Greece and Rome,

Rome, with which our tragedies abound: ſo that, in effect, the natural and tender love in our comedies is not ſtol'n from the tragic muſe; it is not *Thalia* who has committed a theft upon *Melpomene*, but, on the other hand, *Melpomene*, who for a long time has worn the buſkins of *Thalia*.

If we caſt our eyes on the firſt tragedies that had ſuch amazing ſucceſs in the time of Cardinal *Richelieu*, the *Sophoniſba* of *Mairet*, *Mariamne*, *Tyrannic Love*, and *Alcyone*, we ſhall remark that love, in every one of them, talks in a ſtile quite familiar, and ſometimes extremely low; no leſs ridiculous than the pompous tone and emphaſis of their heroiſm: this is perhaps the reaſon why, at that time, we had not one tolerable comedy, becauſe the the tragic ſcene had ſtole away all its rights and privileges: it is even probable, that this determin'd *Molicre* ſeldom to beſtow upon his lovers any ſtrong lively and intereſting paſſion for each other: tragedy, he perceiv'd, had anticipated him in this particular.

From the time when the *Sophoniſba* of *Mairet* appear'd, which was our firſt regular tragedy, we began to conſider the declarations of love from our heroes, and the artful and coquettiſh replies of our heroines, together with ſtrong pictures of love and gallantry, as

things

things eſſentially neceſſary to the tragic ſcene: there are writings of thoſe times ſtill extant which quote the following verſes, ſpoken by *Maſſiniſſa* after the battle of Cirte, not without great Eulogiums on their extraordinary merit.

By mutual flames I find my flame approv'd,
And love the more, the more I am belov'd;
Sighs grow by ſighs, and wiſhes wiſhes form,
As waves by waves are laſh'd into a ſtorm;
When two fond hearts indulgent Hymen chains,
Alike ſhou'd be their pleaſures and their pains.

The cuſtom of talking thus about love corrupted even ſome of our beſt writers; even thoſe, whoſe manly and ſublime geniuſes were made to reſtore tragedy to its ancient ſplendor, cou'd not eſcape the contagion: in ſome of our fineſt pieces we meet with, "* *an unhappy* "* *face, that ſubdued the courage of a Roman knight.*" The lover ſays to his miſtreſs, "† *Adieu, thou too* "*virtuous, and too charming object.*" To which the

* ——————un malheureux viſage,
Qui d'un Chevalier Romain captiva le courage.
† Adieu, trop vertueux objet, & trop charmant.

Heroine

Heroine replies, adieu "* *thou too unhappy and too per-* "*fect lover.*" *Cleopatra* tells us, that a princeſs, "† *who loves her reputation, if ſhe owns her love, is* "*ſure to be belov'd.*" And that Cæſar "‡ *ſighs, and* "*in a plaintive tone acknowledges himſelf her captive,* "*even in the field of victory:*" adding, that *ſhe alone muſt be cruel, and make Cæſar unhappy.* To which her Confidante replies, "§ *I wou'd venture to ſwear that* "*your charms boaſt a power which they will never make* "*uſe of.*"

In all thoſe pieces of the ſame author, which were writen after his *Death of Pompey*, we are ſorry to find the paſſion of love always treated in this familiar manner; but, without taking the unneceſſary trouble of producing more examples of theſe glaring abſurdities, let us only conſider ſome of the beſt verſes which the author of Cinna has brought on the ſtage as maxims of

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* Adieu, trop malheureux, & trop parfait amant.

† ——————aimant ſa renommee
En avouant qu'elle aime eſt ſure d'etre aimée.

‡ ——trace des ſoupirs, & du'n ſtile plaintif,
Dans ſon champ de victoire il ſedit ſon captif.

§ T'oſerois bien jurer que vos charmans appas
Se vantent d'un pouvoir dont ils n'uſeront pas.

I have here given the original of theſe few ſhort quotations, that the reader may ſee the full force, both of the abſurdity, and of Mr. *Voltaire*'s ridicule of it.

gallantry.

gallantry. " *There are certain ſecret ties, and ſympa-*
" *thetic feelings, by whoſe ſoft affinity ſouls are link'd to-*
" *gether, attach'd to, and ſtruck by each other by I know*
" *not what charm, which it is impoſſible to account for.*"
Wou'd one ever conceive that theſe ſentiments, which are certainly highly comic, came out of the mouth of a princeſs of *Parthia*, who goes to her lover to aſk her mother's life? In ſuch a dreadful criſis, who wou'd talk of the *ſympathetic feelings by whoſe ſoft affinity ſouls are link'd together?* Wou'd *Sophocles* ever have produced ſuch madrigals? do not all theſe amorous ſentiments belong to comedy only?

That great writer, who has carry'd the harmony of verſe to ſuch a point of perfection, he who made love ſpeak a language at once ſo noble and ſo pathetic, has, notwithſtanding, brought into his tragedies ſeveral ſcenes which *Boileau* thought much more proper for the elevated ſtile of *Terence's* comedies, than ſuitable to the dignity of the great rival of *Euripides*, who is even ſometimes ſuperior to him. One might quote above an hundred verſes in this taſte; not but that this familiar ſimplicity has its beauties, and may ſerve by way of preparation for the pathetic; but if theſe ſtrokes of ſimplicity belong even to the tragic muſe, with ſtill more reaſon do they ſuit high comedy: this is the exact

act point where tragedy deſcends, and comedy raiſes itſelf; where the two arts meet, as it were, and touch each other: here their ſeveral limits are confounded: and if *Oreſtes* and *Hermione* are permitted to ſay,

'O do not wiſh for the fate of *Pyrrhus*, I ſhould 'hate you too much—you wou'd love me ſtill more: 'O that you wou'd look on me in another manner! 'you wiſh to love me, and yet I cannot pleaſe you: 'you wou'd love me, madam, by wiſhing me to hate '—for, in ſhort, he hates you; his heart is other-'wiſe engaged; he has no longer———

'Who told you, my lord, that he deſpiſes me? do 'you think the ſight of me inſpires contempt?'

If theſe heroes, I ſay, expreſs themſelves in this familiar manner, with how much greater reaſon ſhou'd we admire the *Miſanthrope* ſpeaking thus with vehemence to his miſtreſs?

"Rather bluſh you, for ſo you ought, I have too "ſure teſtimony of your falſehood—it was not in vain "that my love was alarm'd, but think not I will tamely "bear the injury without being reveng'd—'tis a trea-"ſon, a perfidy which cannot be too ſeverely puniſhed; "yes, I will give a looſe to my reſentment, I am no "longer maſter of myſelf, paſſion intirely poſſeſſes

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'me: mortally wounded as I am by you, my ſenſes "are no longer under the government of reaſon."

Certainly, if all the *Miſanthrope* was in this taſte, it wou'd no longer be a comedy; and if *Oreſtes* and *Hermione* talk'd throughout in the manner they do in the lines above quoted, it wou'd be no tragedy: but after theſe two very different ſpecies met thus together, they fall back each into their proper ſphere; one reſumes the pleaſant ſtile, and the other the ſublime.

Comedy therefore, I repeat it once more, may be impaſſion'd, may be in tranſport, or in tears, provided at the ſame time that it makes the good and virtuous ſmile: but if it was intirely deſtitute of the *vis comica*, if, from beginning to end, it had nothing in it but the ſerious and melancholy, it wou'd then be a ſpecies of writing very faulty, and very diſagreeable. It muſt be acknowledg'd, that there is no ſmall difficulty in making the ſpectators paſs inſenſibly from tears to laughter, and yet this tranſition, hard as it is to manage in a comedy, is not the leſs natural. We have already remark'd in another place, that nothing is more common than accidents that afflict the mind, ſome certain circumſtances of which may, notwithſtanding, excite at leaſt a momentary

ſtth and gayety: thus, unhappily for us, is human

nature

nature framed. *Homer* repreſents even his gods laughing at *Vulcan's* aukwardneſs, whilſt they are deciding the fate of the whole univerſe. *Hector* ſmiles at the fears of his ſon *Aſtyanax*, whilſt *Andromache* is ſhedding tears. We often ſee, that even amidſt the horror of battles, conflagrations, and all the diſaſters that mortals are ſubject to, a good thing, luckily hit off, will raiſe a laugh, even in the boſom of terror and pity. In the battle of *Spires*, a regiment was forbid to give quarter, a german officer begg'd his life of one of ours, who anſwer'd him thus: "*Sir, aſk anything in the word elſe, but as to your life, I can't poſſibly grant it.*" This dry and whimſical anſwer paſs'd from one to another, and every body laugh'd in the midſt of ſlaughter and deſtruction; why therefore ſhou'd not laughter follow the moſt ſerious and affecting ſcenes in a comedy? don't we ſympathiſe with *Alcmena*'s diſtreſs, and yet laugh with *Sofia?* how ridiculous it is to diſpute againſt experience! if thoſe who ſtill conteſt this matter love rhime better than reaſon, let them take the following verſes.

O'er this ſtrange world ſtill reigns the tyrant love,
And all by turns his powerful influence prove;
Sometimes a mighty empire he o'erthrows,
Now ſoars in lofty verſe, now creeps in proſe;

Sometimes in tragic garb his paſſion mourns,
Sometimes the humbler comic muſe adorns:
Fire in his eyes, and arrows in his hand,
He ſpreads or pains or pleaſures thro' the land:
In plaintive elegy his carols ſweet
Now ſings, now jocund laughs at *Sylvia*'s feet:
For ever varying, and for ever new,
From *ſerious Maro* down to gay *Chaulieu*:
Bound by no laws, and to no verſe confin'd,
He rules o'er every ſtate, and ev'ry mind,
The univerſal idol of mankind.

NANINE.

NANINE.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

The Count d'OLBAN, a nobleman retir'd into the country.

The Baroneſs de l'ORME, a relation of the Count's, a haughty imperious woman, of a bad temper, and diſagreeable to live with.

The Marchioneſs d'OLBAN, mother of the Count.

NANINE, a young girl, brought up in the Count's houſe.

PHILIP HOMBERT, a peaſant in the neighbourhood.

BLAISE, the gardener.

GERMON, MARIN, } Servants

SCENE, the Count d'OLBAN's country ſeat.

NANINE.

*NANINE.

A

COMEDY.

ACT I. SCENE I.

The Count d'OLBAN, the Baroneſs de l'ORME.

BARONESS.

IN ſhort, my lord, it is time to come to an explanation with regard to this affair; we are no children, therefore let us talk freely: you have been a widower for theſe two years paſt, and I a widow about as long: the law-ſuit in which we were unfortunately engag'd,

* This Comedy is call'd in the French Nanine, ou le prejugé vaincu Nanine, or Prejudice overcome. It is written, as we are told in the title page, in verſes of ten ſyllables. The abſurdity of Comedies in rhime I have already remark'd. The original begins thus:

Il faut parler, il faut, Monſieur le *Comte*,
Vous expliquer nettement ſur mon *Compte*.

The reader cannot but obſerve, what villainous rhimes *Comte* and *Compte* are, and perhaps will more readily forgive my reducing this comedy into plain proſe.

and which gave us both ſo much uneaſineſs, is at an end; and all our animoſities, I hope, now bury'd with thoſe who were the cauſes of them.

COUNT.

I am glad on't; for law-ſuits were always my averſion.

BARONESS.

And am not I as hateful as a law-ſuit?

COUNT.

You madam?

BARONESS.

Yes, I, ſir: for theſe two years paſt we have liv'd together, with freedom, as relations and friends; the ties of blood, taſte, and intereſt, ſeem to unite us, and to point out a more intimate connection.

COUNT.

Intereſt, madam? make uſe of ſome better term, I beſeech you.

BARONESS.

That, ſir, I cannot; but with grief I find, your inconſtant heart no longer conſiders me in any other light than as your relation.

COUNT.

I do not wear the appearance, madam, of a trifler.

BARONESS.

You wear the appearance, ſir, of a perjur'd villain.

COUNT.

COUNT. [Aſide.

Ha! what's this?

BARONESS.

Yes, ſir: you know the ſuit my huſband began againſt you, to recover my eſtate, was, by agreement, to have been terminated by a marriage; a marriage you told me, of choice; you were engag'd to me, you know you are; and he who defers the execution of his promiſe ſeldom means to perform it.

COUNT.

You know, I wait for my mother's conſent.

BARONESS.

A doting old woman: well, ſir, and what then?

COUNT.

I love and reſpect her yet.

BARONESS.

But I do not, ſir. Come, come, theſe are idle frivolous excuſes for your unpardonable falſehood: you wait not for her, or for any body; perfidious, ungrateful man!

COUNT.

Who told you ſo, madam, and whence all this violence of paſſion? who told you ſo? whence comes your information, madam?

BARONESS.

Who told me? yourſelf, yourſelf. Your words, your manner, your air, your whole behaviour, put on on purpoſe to affront me: it ſhocks me to ſee it: act in another manner, or find ſome better excuſes for your conduct: can you think me blind to the ſhameful unworthy paſſion that directs you, a paſſion for the loweſt meaneſt object? you have deceiv'd me, ſir, baſely deceiv'd me.

COUNT.

'Tis falſe, I cannot deceive; diſſimulation is no part of my character. I own to you, there was a time when you were agreeable to me, I admir'd you, and flatter'd myſelf that I ſhou'd have found in you a treaſure to make amends for that which heaven had depriv'd me of; I hoped in this ſweet aſylum to have taſted the fruits of a peaceful and happy union: but you have found out the means to deſtroy your own power. Love, as I told you long ſince, has two quivers, one fill'd with darts, tipp'd with the pureſt flame, which inſpires the ſoul with tender feelings, refines our taſte, and ſentiments, enlivens our affection, and enhances our pleaſures: the other is full of cruel arrows, that wound our hearts with quarrels, jealouſy, and ſuſpicion, bring on coldneſs and indifference, and remove

the

the warmth of paſſion to make room for diſguſt and ſatiety: theſe, madam, are the darts which you have drawn forth, againſt us both, and yet you expect that I ſhou'd love.

BARONESS.

There, indeed, I own myſelf in the wrong: I ought not to expect it: it is not in your power: but you are falſe, and now wou'd reproach me for it, and I muſt ſuffer your inſults, your fine ſimilies and illuſtrations: but pray, ſir, what is it I have done to loſe this mighty treaſure? what have you to find fault with?

COUNT.

Your temper, your humours, madam: beauty pleaſes the eye alone, ſoftneſs and complacency charm the ſoul.

BARONESS.

And have not you your humours too, ſir?

COUNT.

Doubtleſs, madam; and, for that very reaſon, wou'd have an indulgent wife; one whoſe ſweet complying goodneſs wou'd bend a little to my frailties, and condeſcend to reconcile me to myſelf, to heal my wounds without burning them, to correct without aſſuming, to govern without being a tyrant, to inſinuate herſelf by degrees into my heart, as the light

of

of a fine day opens gradually on the weak and delicate eye: he who feels the yoke that is put on him will always murmur at it; and tyrannic love is a deity whom I abjure: I wou'd be a lover, but not a ſlave: your pride, madam, wou'd make me contemptible: I have faults, I own I have; but heaven made woman to correct the leaven of our ſouls, to ſoften our afflictions, ſweeten our bad humours, ſooth our paſſions, and make us better and happier beings: this was what they were deſign'd for; and, for my part, I wou'd prefer uglineſs and affability to beauty with pride and arrogance.

BARONESS.

Excellently well moraliſ'd, indeed; and ſo when you inſult, abuſe, and betray me, I in return, with mean complacency, muſt forgive the ſhameful extravagance of your paſſion; and your aſſum'd air of grandeur and magnanimity muſt be a ſufficient excuſe to me for all the baſeneſs of your heart.

COUNT.

How, madam?

BARONESS.

Yes, ſir: I know you: it is the young Nanine who has done me this injury; a child, a ſervant, a field beggar, whom my fooliſh tenderneſs nouriſh'd and ſupported;

ported; whom your fond eaſy mother, touch'd with falſe pity, took up out of the boſom of penury and ſorrow. O you bluſh, ſir, do you?

COUNT.

I, madam? I wiſh her well.

BARONESS.

You love her, ſir: I know you do.

COUNT.

Well, madam, and if I did love her, know, I wou'd openly avow it.

BARONESS.

Nay, I believe you are capable of it.

COUNT.

I am ſo.

BARONESS.

And wou'd you break thus through all the bounds of decency, degrade your rank, demean your birth, and, plung'd as you are in ſhame and infamy, laugh at and defy all honour?

COUNT.

Call it prejudice: whatever you, or the world may think, madam, I never miſtake vanity for honour and glory: you love pomp and ſplendor, and place grandeur

grandeur and nobility in a coat of arms: I look for it in the heart. The man of worth, who has modeſty with courage, and the woman who has ſenſe and ſpirit, tho' without fortune, rank, or title, are, in my eyes, the firſt of human kind.

BARONESS.

But ſure they ought to have ſome rank and condition in life. Wou'd you treat a low born ſcholar, or an honeſt man of the meaneſt birth, becauſe he had a little virtue, in the ſame manner, and with the ſame reſpect, as your wou'd a lord?

COUNT.

The virtuous ſhou'd always have the preference.

BARONESS.

This extravagant humility is inſupportable: do we owe nothing then to our rank?

COUNT.

Yes: to be honeſt.

BARONESS.

My noble blood wou'd aſpire to a higher character.

COUNT.

That is a high one, which defies the vulgar.

BARO-

BARONESS.

Thus you degrade all quality.

COUNT.

No: thus I do honour to humanity.

BARONESS.

Ridiculous! what then becomes of the world? what is faſhion?

COUNT.

Faſhion, madam, is deſpis'd by wiſdom: I will obey its ridiculous commands in my dreſs perhaps, but not in my ſentiments: No: it becomes a man to act like a man, to preſerve to himſelf his own taſte and his own thoughts: am I ridiculouſly to aſk of others what I am to ſeek, or to avoid, to praiſe, or condemn? muſt the world decide my fate? ſurely I have my reaſon, and that ſhou'd be my guide: apes were made for imitation only, but man ſhou'd act from his own heart.

BARONESS.

Why, this to be ſure is freedom of ſentiment, and talking like a philoſopher. Go then, thou noble and ſublime ſoul, go, and fall in love with village damſels, be the happy rival of ploughmen and hedgers: go, and ſupport the honour of your race.

COUNT.

Good heaven! what muſt I do? How am I to act?

SCENE

SCENE II.

The COUNT, the BARONESS, BLAISE.

COUNT.

Well, ſir, what do you want?

BLAISE.

Your poor gardener, ſir, humbly beſeeches your honour ———

COUNT.

My honour! well, Blaiſe, and what wou'd'ſt thou have of my honour?

BLAISE.

An pleaſe your honour, I wou'd fain—be marry'd and ———

COUNT.

With all my heart, Blaiſe, you have my conſent; I like your deſign, and will aſſiſt you: I love folks ſhou'd marry. Well, and thy ſpouſe elect, Blaiſe, what! is ſhe? handſome?

BLAISE.

O yes, ſir, a delicate little morſel.

BARONESS.

And does ſhe like you, Blaiſe?

BLAISE.

O yes.

COUNT.

COUNT.

Well, and her name is?

BLAISE.

Yes, 'tis———

COUNT.

What?

BLAISE.

The pretty Nanine.

COUNT.

Nanine?

BARONESS.

Well, very well indeed! I approve of the match extremely.

COUNT. [Aside.

O heav'n! how am I ſunk! it cannot, muſt not be.

BLAISE.

I's ſure, maiſter will like it.

COUNT.

What! did you ſay ſhe lov'd you, raſcal?

BLAISE.

I beg pardon, ſir, I———

COUNT.

Did ſhe tell you that ſhe lov'd you, ſir?

BLAISE.

hers; money, and land, every thing I have, body and ſoul, Blaiſe and all.

BARONESS.

Believe me, Blaiſe, I wiſh you as well as you can wiſh yourſelf, and ſhou'd be glad to ſerve you: I ſhou'd be glad to ſee you marry'd this very night: nay, what's more, I'll give her a portion.

BLAISE.

O good dear baroneſs! how I do love you! is it poſſible you can make me ſo happy?

BARONESS.

Alas! Blaiſe, I am afraid I cannot; we ſhall never ſucceed.

BLAISE.

O but you muſt, madam.

BARONESS.

I wiſh to God ſhe was your wife: wait for my orders.

BLAISE.

And muſt I wait? not long I hope.

BARONESS.

Be gone.

BLAISE.

Servant, madam: I ſhall have her, I ſhall have her.

SCENE

SCENE IV.

The BARONESS. [Alone.

What a ſtrange adventure! cou'd I have receiv'd a more cruel injury? a more ſhameful affront? the Count d' Olban rivall'd by a gardener —— here, boy, [*ſhe calls out to her ſervant*] fetch Nanine to me: ſince I am ſo unhappy, I muſt examine her: where cou'd ſhe have learn'd this art of flattery? who taught her to gain hearts, and to preſerve them, to light up a ſtrong and a laſting flame? where? doubtleſs, in her eyes, in plain and ſimple nature: but this ſhameful and unworthy paſſion of his is ſtill a ſecret; it has not dared as yet to appear openly. D' Olban, I ſee, has his ſcruples about it: ſo much the worſe; if he had none, I might ſtill have hopes; but he has all the ſymptoms of true love: O! here ſhe comes, the ſight of her hurts me; nature is moſt unjuſt, to beſtow ſo much beauty on ſuch a creature; 'tis an affront to nobility: come this way, madam.

SCENE V.

The BARONESS, NANINE.

NANINE.

Madam.

BARO-

BARONESS.

And yet, after all, ſhe is not ſo very handſome; thoſe great black eyes of her's expreſs nothing; but if they have ſaid, I love; ay, there's the danger: but I muſt—come this way, child.

NANINE.

I come, madam, as is my duty.

BARONESS.

Yes: but you make me wait a little for you; prythee, child, ſtep on: how aukwardly ſhe is made! what a mein there is! he was never made for ſuch a creature as thee.

NANINE.

'Tis very true, madam: I aſſure you, I have often bluſh'd in ſecret when I look'd on theſe fine clothes: but they were your firſt preſent to me, the effect of that goodneſs which I ſhall ever acknowledge, and of that generous care with which you were pleas'd to honour me: you took a pride in dreſſing me: O, madam, remember how often you have protected me: believe me, madam, I am ſtill the ſame: why ſhou'd you wiſh to humble a ſubmiſſive heart, which can never forget itſelf?

BARONESS.

Bring that couch nearer to me — O I am diſtracted: whence come you? what have you been about?

NANINE.

NANINE.

Reading, madam.

BARONESS.

Reading what?

NANINE.

An Engliſh book that was given me.

BARONESS.

What's the ſubject of it?

NANINE.

'Tis extremely intereſting: the author wou'd have us believe that we are all brethren, all born equal, and on a level with each other; but 'tis an idle chimera, I can't reconcile myſelf to his doctrine.

BARONESS. [Aſide.

She will ſoon, I ſuppoſe—what vanity! [*To Nanine*] bring me my ſtandiſh, and pen and ink.

NANINE.

Yes, madam.

BARONESS.

No; ſtay: give me ſomething to drink.

NANINE.

What, madam?

BARONESS.

Nothing: it's no matter: take my fan. — go and fetch my gloves—or — ſtay — it does not ſignify, you need

need not: come hither: take you care, I desire, never to think yourself handsome.

NANINE.

That, madam, is a lesson you have so often taught me, that if I had so much vanity, and self-love had such influence over my foolish heart, you wou'd soon have cured me of it.

BARONESS. [Aside.

Where can she have learn'd all this? how I hate her! beauty and wit together! 'tis intolerable — hark'ee, child, you know the tenderness I had for you in your infancy.

NANINE.

Yes, madam, and I hope my youth will be honour'd with equal goodness from you.

BARONESS.

Be careful then to deserve it: it is my intention now, this very day, nay this very hour, to fix and establish your happiness; judge then whether I love you.

NANINE.

To fix my happiness?

BARONESS.

Yes: I will give you a portion: the husband I design for you is well-made, and every way worthy of you; a proper match for you in every particular, and the

the only one that at preſent cou'd ſuit you: you ought to thank me for the choice: in a word, 'tis Blaiſe the gardener.

NANINE.

Blaiſe, madam?

BARONESS.

Yes: why that ſimpering? do you heſitate a moment to conſent? my offers, madam, I wou'd have you to know, are commands; obey, or expect my reſentment.

NANINE.

But, madam —

BARONESS.

Let me have no *buts*, they offend me: a pretty thing indeed, for your impertinence to refuſe a huſband at my hands! that ſimple heart of yours is ſwell'd to a fine degree of vanity: but your boldneſs is a little premature, and your triumph will be of ſhort duration: you take advantage of the capricious fortune of one lucky day, but ſhall ſoon ſee what will be the event. Thou ungrateful little wretch, haſt thou the inſolence to pleaſe? you underſtand me, madam, but I'll bring you back to that nothingneſs from whence you came, and you ſhall lament your folly and your pride: I'll ſhut you up for the reſt of your life in a convent.

NANINE.

On my knees I thank you, madam; do, ſhut me up, my fate will be too mild: yes, madam, of all the benefits you have ever beſtow'd on me, this, which you call a puniſhment, I ſhall eſteem the greateſt favour: ſhut me up for ever in a cloiſter, there I will thank you for your goodneſs, and bleſs my dear maſter: there I ſhall learn to calm thoſe cruel fears, thoſe dreadful alarms, thoſe worſt of evils, thoſe paſſions that are far more dangerous to me even than your reſentment, which fills me with terror and aſtoniſhment: O madam, by that anger, I entreat you, deliver me, ſave me, ſave me, if poſſible, from myſelf; this moment I am ready to go.

BARONESS.

What do I hear? can it be? are you in earneſt, Nanine, or mean you to deceive me?

NANINE.

No: indeed I do not. O do me this charming, this divine favour; my heart ſtands too much in need of it.

BARONESS. [With tranſport.

Riſe then, and let me embrace you. O happy hour! my dear Nanine, my friend, I'll go this inſtant and prepare your ſweet retreat. O 'tis a charming thing to live in a convent!

NANINE.

NANINE.

'Tis at leaſt a ſhelter from the world, and all its cares.

BARONESS.

O, my dear, 'tis a delightful ſituation.

NANINE.

Do you think ſo, madam?

BARONESS.

This world is a hateful place—jealous —

NANINE. [Sighing.

'Tis ſo indeed.

BARONESS.

Fooliſh, wicked, vain, deceitful, inconſtant, and ungrateful: O 'tis a horrid place.

NANINE.

Yes, I ſee it wou'd be fatal to me, I ought to flee from it.

BARONESS.

You ought indeed: a good convent is the beſt haven of ſecuriiy: Now, my good lord, I think, I ſhall be beforehand with you.

NANINE.

Did you ſay any thing about my maſter, madam?

BARONESS.

O Nanine, I love thee even to madneſs: this moment I wou'd, if poſſible, lock thee up never to come out again: but to night it is too late, we muſt wait till morning. Hark'ee, child, come to me at midnight to my apartment, and we will ſet off ſecretly for the convent: be ready by five at furtheſt.

SCENE VI.

NANINE. [Alone.

How diſtreſsful is my condition! what trouble and uneaſineſs do I feel! and what various paſſions riſe in my ſoul! to leave ſo good, ſo amiable a maſter, perhaps to offend him by it: and yet, if I had ſtay'd, this exceſs of his goodneſs might have brought on worſe calamities, and put his whole family in confuſion. The baroneſs ſeems apprehenſive he has a particular regard for me: but his heart cou'd never ſtoop ſo low; I muſt not, dare not think of it: and my lady ſeems deſperately angry about it: am I hated then, and ſhow'd I be afraid of being belov'd? O but myſelf, myſelf I have moſt reaſon to fear, and my fooliſh heart, that beats ſo at the thought of him. What will become of me? taken out of my humble ſtate, my notions now are too refined and too exalted: it is a misfortune, nay,

and

and it is a fault too, to have a mind above one's condition. I muſt go: I know it will kill me: but no matter.

SCENE VII.

The COUNT, NANINE, a ſervant.

COUNT.

Stay at that door there ſomebody, d'ye hear? bring chairs here, quick, make haſte. [*He bows to Nanine, who makes him a low courteſy.*] Come, ſit down.

NANINE.

Who, I ſir?

COUNT.

Yes: I will have it ſo: I mean to pay you, Nanine, that reſpect which your conduct, your beauty, and merit deſerve: ſhines the diamond with leſs luſtre, or is it leſs valuable, becauſe found in a deſert? What's the matter? your eyes ſeem bath'd in tears: O I ſee it but too plain; our angry baroneſs, jealous of your charms, has been venting her ill humours on you, and left my poor girl weeping.

NANINE.

No, ſir, no: her goodneſs, I aſſure you, to me was never greater than at preſent; but every thing here ſoftens and affects me.

COUNT.

I'm glad to hear it; I was afraid it was ſome of her malice.

NANINE.

Why ſo, ſir?

COUNT.

O my dear girl, jealouſy reigns in every breaſt: every man is jealous when he is in love, and every woman even before ſhe is ſo. A young and beautiful girl, who at the ſame time is good-natured and ſincere, is ſure to diſpleaſe her whole ſex: men are more juſt, and we endeavour as well as we can to revenge ourſelves on you for your jealouſy: but, with regard to Nanine, I only do her juſtice, I love that heart which is void of artifice; I admire the diſplay of thoſe extraordinary talents which you have ſo finely cultivated; and I am both ſurpris'd and charm'd at the ingenuous ſimplicity of your manners.

NANINE.

O, ſir, my merit is ſmall indeed; but I have ſeen you, have heard and been inſtructed by you: you have rais'd me too high above my humble birth: I owe you but too much: from you only I have learn'd to think.

COUNT.

O Nanine, wit and good-ſenſe are not to be taught.

NAININE.

I think too much, I fear, for one in my ſtation: my fortune deſign'd me for the loweſt rank in life.

COUNT.

Your virtues have plac'd you in the higheſt: but tell me ingenuouſly, what effect had that Engliſh book I lent you?

NANINE.

Not convinc'd me at all, ſir: I am more than ever of opinion, that there are hearts ſo noble and ſo generous, that all others muſt appear mean and vile when put in compariſon with them.

COUNT.

True, Nanine, and you are yourſelf a proof of it: but permit me to raiſe you for the future to a rank and ſtation here leſs unworthy of you.

NANINE.

My condition, ſir, is already too high, and too deſirable for me.

COUNT.

No, Nanine, that cannot be: henceforward I ſhall conſider you as one of the family; my mother is coming, ſhe will look on you as her daughter; my

eſteem, and her tender friendſhip, will put you on a different footing, and place you in a better rank than you have hitherto held under a proud and imperious woman.

NANINE. [Aſide.

She only taught me my duty, ſir — and a hard one it is to fulfil.

COUNT.

What duty? yours, Nanine, is only to pleaſe, and that you always perform; wou'd I cou'd do ſo too! but you ſhou'd be more at your eaſe, and appear with more ſplendor; you are not yet in your proper ſphere.

NANINE.

I am indeed quite out of it, and it is that which makes me unhappy; 'tis my misfortune, perhaps an irreparable one. [*Riſing*] O my lord, my maſter, remove, I beſeech you, from me all theſe vanities: I am confus'd, overwhelm'd with your exceſs of goodneſs; let me live unknown and unenvy'd; heav'n form'd me for obſcurity, and humility has nothing in it that to me is grating or diſagreeable: leave me to my retreat; what ſhou'd I do in the world, what ſhou'd I wiſh to ſee there, after the admiration of your virtues?

COUNT

COUNT. [To himſelf,

It is too much, I can reſiſt no longer.

[To Nanine.

You remain in obſcurity? you?

NANINE.

Whatever I may do, permit me to aſk one favour of you.

COUNT.

What is it? ſpeak.

NANINE.

For ſome time paſt you have loaded me with preſents.

COUNT.

Pardon me, Nanine, I acted but as a tender father, who lov'd his child: I have not the art to ſet off my preſents by flattery, I aim not at gallantry, and only deſire to be juſt: fortune had done you wrong, and I meant to revenge the injury: but nature, in recompence for it, laviſh'd all her bounties on you, and her I ſtrove to imitate.

NANINE.

You have done a great deal too much; but I flatter myſelf I may be permitted, without being thought ungrateful, to diſpoſe of thoſe noble preſents, which I ſhall ever hold dear becauſe they came from you.

COUNT.

You mean to affront me, ſure.

SCENE VIII.

The COUNT, NANINE, GERMON.

GERMON.

My lady wants you; ſhe waits.

COUNT.

Let her wait then: what! can't I ſpeak a moment to you without being interrupted?

NANINE.

It gives me pain to leave you; but you know, ſir, ſhe was my miſtreſs.

COUNT.

No: I know it not, nor ever will.

NANINE.

She has ſtill a power over me.

COUNT.

No ſuch thing: ſhe ſhall have none—you ſigh, Nanine, there's ſomething at the bottom of that heart; what's the matter?

NANINE.

NANINE.

I am ſorry to leave you ſir—but I muſt—O heaven now all is over.

[She goes out.

SCENE IX.

The COUNT, GERMON.

COUNT. [To himſelf.

She wept as ſhe left me; for a long time ſhe has groan'd beneath the tyrannical caprice of this peeviſh baroneſs, who inſults her: and by what right, or what authority? but 'tis an abuſe which I will never ſuffer: this world is nothing but a lottery of wealth, titles, dignities, rights, and privileges, barter'd for without legal claim, and ſcatter'd without diſtinction — here, you,—

GERMON.

My lord.

COUNT.

To morrow morning lay this purſe of a hundred louis-dor's upon her toilette; be ſure you don't fail; you muſt then go and ſee after her ſervants below, they'll wait there.

GERMON.

The baroneſs ſhall certainly have them on her toilette according to your orders.

COUNT

COUNT.

Blockhead, they're not for her: for Nanine, I tell you.

GERMON.

O very well, ſir, I beg pardon.

COUNT.

Be gone, leave me. [*Germon goes out.*] This tenderneſs of mine can never be a weakneſs in me: true, I idoliſe her; but my heart was not touch'd by her beauty only, her character is to the laſt degree amiable: I admire her ſoul; but then her low condition—it is too high; were ſhe lower, I ſhou'd love her yet more: but can I marry her? doubtleſs I may; can one pay too dear for being happy? ſhall I fear the cenſure of an idle world, and let pride deprive me of all I wiſh for? but then cuſtom——a cruel tyrant: nature has a prior right, and ſhou'd be obey'd: and ſo I am Blaiſe's rival too; and why not? Blaiſe is a man; he loves her, and he is in the right of it: ſhe can be but in the poſſeſſion of one, though the deſire of all: gardeners may ſigh for her, and ſo might kings: my happineſs will juſtify my choice.

End of the First Act.

ACT

ACT II. SCENE I.

The COUNT, MARIN.

COUNT. [To himſelf.

WELL: this night is a whole year to me: not once have I cloſed my eyes-lids: every body is aſleep but me; Nanine ſleeps in peace, a ſweet repoſe refreſhes her charms, whilſt I wander from place to place, and can find no reſt: I ſit down to write, but can't: then ſtrive to read, but all in vain; I don't know the words before me whilſt I am looking on them, nor can my mind retain a ſingle idea: methinks, in every page, I ſee the name of Nanine imprinted by ſome hand divine——hola! whoſe there? all aſleep? Germon, Marin.

MARIN. [Behind the ſcenes.

Coming, ſir.

COUNT.

You idle raſcals, make haſte, it's broad day-light; come, come.

MARIN.

Lard, ſir, what ſpirit has rais'd you up ſo early this morning?

COUNT.

Love.

MARIN.

MARIN.

O ho! my lady will let none of us ſleep long in this houſe; what did you want, ſir?

COUNT.

Why, Marin, I muſt have, let me ſee, by to-morrow at furtheſt, ſix new horſes, a new equipage, a clever chamber-maid, notable, and careful, a valet-de-chambre, and two footmen, young, and well-made, and no libertines; ſome diamonds, ſome very fine buckles, ſome gold trinkets, and ſome new ſtuffs; therefore be gone, ride poſt to Paris this inſtant, never mind killing a few horſes.

MARIN.

O ho, I ſee how it is; you are caught; my lady baroneſs is to be our miſtreſs to day, I ſuppoſe; you are going to be marry'd to her at laſt?

COUNT.

Whatever my intention is, go you about your buſineſs; fly, and make haſte back.

MARIN.

I'm gone, ſir.

SCENE

SCENE II.

The COUNT, GERMON.

COUNT. [To himſelf.

l ſhall I then enjoy the ſweet pleaſure of honour-
f making happy the dear object of my love? aroneſs, I know, will be in a rage: with all my let her rave as long as ſhe will; I deſpiſe her, e world, and its opinion; and am afraid of no I will never be the ſlave of prejudice, it is an enemy we ought to ſubdue, thoſe who make a ratio-nd more virtuous, and thoſe only are reſpecta-ut hark! what noiſe is that in the court? a t ſure: it muſt be ſo; yet who cou'd come at ne in the morning? my mother perhaps. Ger-

GERMON.

COUNT.

at is that?

GERMON.

hariot, ſir.

COUNT.

o's is it? any body coming here?

GERMON.

ſir, they're going.

COUNT.

COUNT.

Going? who? where?

GERMON.

The baroneſs, ſir, going out immediately.

COUNT.

O with all my heart, let her go for ever if ſhe pleaſes!

GERMON.

Nanine and ſhe are this minute ſetting out.

COUNT.

O heav'n! what ſayſt thou? Nanine?

GERMON.

So the maid ſays, ſir.

COUNT.

How is this?

GERMON.

My lady, ſir, is going with her this morning, to put her into a neighbouring convent.

COUNT.

Away: fly: let us begone: but what am I about? I am too warm to talk to them: no matter, I'll go; I ought——but ſtop, that muſt not be, I ſhou'd at once diſcover all my paſſion: no—go, Germon, ſtop them; let every thing be faſt; bring Nanine to me, or anſwer it with your life. [*Germon goes out*] So they wou'd

wou'd have carry'd her off! what a dreadful ſtroke! ungrateful, cruel, unjuſt woman! how have I deſerv'd this! what have I done! I only lov'd, and adored her; but never declar'd my paſſion; never endeavour'd to force her inclinations, or to alarm her fearful innocence: why ſhou'd ſhe fly from me? the more I think on it, the more I am aſtoniſh'd.

SCENE III.

The COUNT, NANINE.

COUNT.

My ſweet girl, is it you? what, run away from me? anſwer me, explain this myſt'ry to me: terrify'd, I ſuppoſe, with the baroneſs's threats, you were willing to eſcape; and that tender regard which I have long had for your virtues, I know, has quickned her reſentment: you cou'd not ſure yourſelf have thought of leaving me, of depriving this place of its faireſt ornament: laſt night, when I ſaw you in tears, tell me, Nanine, had you any intention of this? anſwer me, tell me, why wou'd you have wiſh'd to leave me?

NANINE.

Behold me on my knees, and trembling before you

COUNT. [Raiſing her up.

Riſe, Nanine, and tell me—I tremble more myſelf.

NANINE.

NANINE.

My lady, ſir———

COUNT.

Well—what of her?

NANINE.

That lady, ſir, whom I honour and eſteem, did not, I aſſure you, force me to the convent.

COUNT.

And cou'd it then be your own choice? O miſery!

NANINE.

It was, I own it was: I entreated her to reſtrain my wand'ring thoughts—ſhe wanted to have marry'd me.

COUNT.

Indeed? to whom?

NANINE.

To your gardener.

COUNT.

O the worthy choice!

NANINE.

I, ſir, was aſham'd, and to the laſt degree unhappy: I who in vain endeavour to ſtifle ſentiments far above my condition, I whom your bounty had rais'd too high, muſt now be puniſh'd by the loſs of that goodneſs which I never deſerv'd.

COUNT.

COUNT.

You puniſh yourſelf, Nanine, and for what?

NANINE.

For having dared to raiſe the reſentment of your relation, ſir, who was once my miſtreſs; I know, ſir, I am diſagreeable to her; the very ſight of me diſguſts her: ſhe has reaſon indeed, for when I was near her, I was guilty of a weakneſs which I ſhall ever feel; it grows upon me every hour: but I wou'd have torn it from my breaſt; I would have humbled, by the auſterities of a convent, this proud heart, exalted by your goodneſs, and revenged on it the involuntary crime: but the bittereſt grief I felt, was my fear of offending you.

COUNT. [Turning from her, and walking about.

What ſentiments! what a noble and ingenuous mind! Can ſhe be prejudic'd in my favour? was ſhe afraid of loving me? O exalted virtue!

NANINE.

If I have offended you, I beg a thouſand pardons; but permit me, ſir, in ſome deep retreat to hide my ſorrows, and to reflect in ſecret on my own duty, and your goodneſs to me.

COUNT.

COUNT.

No more of that: now, obſerve me, the barones is your friend, and out of her generoſity has provided you with a ſervant, a ruſtic, a boor, for your huſband. I know of one who will at leaſt be leſs unworthy of you: in birth and fortune far ſuperior to Blaiſe; young, honeſt, and well provided for: a man, I aſſure you, of ſenſe and reflection; his character very different from thoſe of the preſent age: if I am not much miſtaken, he'll make you an excellent huſband: is not this better than a convent?

NANINE.

No: ſir, I own to you, this new favour which you wou'd beſtow on me has nothing in it that can give me any real ſatisfaction: you know my grateful heart, read there my real ſentiments, and ſee why I wiſh to retreat from the world: a gardener, or the monarch of the whole world, who ſhou'd offer marriage to me, wou'd be equally diſpleaſing.

COUNT.

You have determin'd me: and now, Nanine, know the man for whom I have deſign'd you: you already eſteem him: he is yours; he adores you: that huſband is—myſelf. I ſee, you are troubled and ſurpriz'd: but ſpeak to me; my life depends on you: O recollect yourſelf, you are ſtrangely agitated.

NANINE.

NANINE.

What do I hear? can it be?

COUNT.

It is no more than you deſerve.

NANINE.

In love with me? O do not think, do not imagine I will ever dare to claim my conqueſt: no, ſir, never will I ſuffer you to deſcend thus low for me: ſuch marriages, believe me, ſir, are always unhappy: taſte goes off, and repentance alone remains. No, I will call your anceſtors to witneſs —— alas! ſir, think not on me: you took pity on my youth: this heart, which you have form'd, which is your own work, wou'd be unworthy of your care, if it cou'd accept from you this nobleſt preſent. No, ſir, I owe you at leaſt this refuſal: my heart ſhall ſacrifice itſelf for your ſake.

COUNT.

No more: for I am reſolv'd, and you ſhall be my wife. Did you not this moment aſſure me you wou'd refuſe every other man, tho' he were a prince?

NANINE.

I did, and repent not of the reſolution.

COUNT.

Do you haet me then?

NANINE.

NANINE.

Shou'd I have fled from, ſhou'd I have avoided, ſhou'd I have fear'd, if I had hated you?

COUNT.

It is enough, and I am fix'd.

NANINE.

What then have you determin'd on?

COUNT.

Our marriage.

NANINE.

Think, ſir.

COUNT.

I have thought of every thing.

NANINE.

And foreſeen too?

COUNT.

I have.

NANINE.

If you love me, believe me, ſir———

COUNT.

I do believe—that I have reſolv'd on the only means to make myſelf happy.

NANINE.

But you forget———

COUNT.

COUNT.

I have forgot nothing: every thing is order'd, and every thing ſhall be ready.

NANINE.

What! in ſpite of all I ſay, will your obſtinate paſſion———

COUNT.

Yes, ſpite of thee, my impatient love muſt urge the happy moment. I will quit thee for a minute, that henceforth we may never part: adieu, my dear Nanine.

SCENE IV.

NANINE. [Alone.

Good heaven! do I dream? or am I indeed arriv'd at the ſubmit of earthly happineſs? 'tis not the honour, great as it is, 'tis not the ſplendor that dazzles me: no: I deſpiſe it all: but to wed the moſt generous of men, the dear object of all my fearful wiſhes, him whom I was ſo much afraid of loving, him whom I adore, yet I love him too much to wiſh he ſhou'd demean himſelf for my ſake: but it is impoſſible to avoid it; I cannot now eſcape him: what can I do? heaven, I truſt, will direct me, and ſupport my weakneſs, perhaps even — but I'll write to him — and yet how to begin, and what to ſay — what a ſurpriſe! I will

will write immediately, before I enter into this ſolemn engagement.

SCENE V.

NANINE, BLAISE.

BLAISE.

O there ſhe is: well, my little maid, my lady has ſpoke to you in my favour, has not ſhe? ha? ſhe writes on, and takes no notice of me.

NANINE. [Writing on.

O Blaiſe, good morrow to you.

BLAISE.

Good morrow is but a cold compliment.

NANINE. [Writing.

Every word I write doubles my diſtreſs, and my whole letter is full of doubts and uneaſineſs.

BLASE.

How ſhe writes off hand! O ſhe's a great genius; and a monſtrous wit: I wiſh I was a wit too, then I'd tell her ——

NANINE.

Well, ſir.

BLAISE.

Lack-a-day, ſhe's ſo clever, I'm afraid to ſpeak: I ſhall never be able to break my mind to her — yet I was hot upon't, and came here o'purpoſe, that I did.

NANINE.

Dear Blaiſe, you muſt do me a piece of ſervice.

BLAISE.

Marry, two, and you will.

NANINE.

I ſhall truſt to your diſcretion, to your good heart, Blaiſe; nay, I do you but juſtice.

BLAISE.

O no ceremony; for look you, ma'am, Blaiſe is ready to ſerve you, and there's an end of it. Come, come, make no ſecret.

NANINE.

You often go to the neighbouring village, to Remival, the right hand of the road.

BLAISE.

Yes, yes.

NANINE.

Cou'd you find one Philip Hombert for me there?

BLAISE.

Philip Hombert? I know nothing of him: what ſort of a man is he?

NANINE.

He came there, I believe, but yeſterday evening; do you enquire him out, and give him immediately this money, and this letter.

BLAISE.

O money is it?

NANINE.

And at the ſame time deliver him this packet: go on horſe-back, that you may return the ſooner: away, make haſte, and be aſſur'd I'll remember you for it.

BLAISE.

I wou'd go for you to the world's end — this Philip Hombert is a happy rogue: the purſe is full: all ready Rhino. What, is it a debt?

NANINE.

Yes: and well-prov'd: nothing can be more ſacred, therefore take care of it: hark'ee, Blaiſe, Hombert may not be known in the village, perhaps he is not yet return'd: if you can't give the letter into his own hands, bring it me back again: my dear friend, remember that.

BLAISE.

My dear friend!

NANINE.

I ſhall depend upon you.

BLAISE.

Her dear friend! O lud!

NANINE.

I rely intirely upon you, and expect every thing from your fidelity.

SCENE VI.

The BARONESS, BLAISE.

BLAISE.

What a meſſage! and where the deuce cou'd this money come from? it won'd have been of ſervice to me in houſe-keeping: but ſhe has a friendſhip for me, and that's better than money, ſo away we go.

[As he is puting the money and letter into his pocket, he meets the baroneſs, and runs full againſt her.

BARONESS.

How now, booby? a little more and you'd broke my head.

BLAISE.

I beg your pardon, madam.

BARONESS.

Where are you going? have you heard any thing of Nanine? what is ſhe about? is the count in a violent paſſion? what have you got there, a letter?

BLAISE.

O that's a ſecret: poiſe on her!

BARONESS.

Let me look at it.

BLAISE.

Nanine will be angry.

BARONESS.

Nanine! cou'd ſhe write, and ſend it by you? give it me this minute, or I'll break off your match immediately; give it me, I ſay.

BLAISE. [Laughing.

He! he!

BARONESS.

What do you laugh at?

BLAISE. [Still laughing.

Ah! ah!

BARONESS.

I muſt know the contents of this; — [*Breaks open the letter*] if I am not miſtaken, they concern me nearly.

BLAISE. [Laughing.

Ah! ah! ah! how ſhe is nick'd now! ſhe has got nothing there but a ſcrap of paper: but I ſhall keep the money, and carry it to Philip Hombert: yes, yes, muſt obey my miſtreſs. Servant, ma'am.

SCENE

SCENE VII.

The BARONESS alone.

Now let's ſee what we have got. [*Reads.*] "Both "my joy and tenderneſs are unſpeakable, as is my "happineſs alſo: what a moment was this for you to "come in! when I cannot ſee or hear you, cannot "throw myſelf into your arms: but, I conjure you, "take theſe packets, and accept the contents of "them. Know, I have been offer'd a moſt noble "and truly enviable condition in life, ſuch as I might "well be dazzled with the proſpect of: but there is "nothing which I wou'd not ſacrifice to the only one "upon earth whom my heart ought to love." Very fine indeed! upon my word, Mrs. Nanine, an excellent ſtile: how prettily ſhe writes! the innocent orphan: her paſſion ſpeaks moſt eloquently: a rare billet this! O, thou ſly jade: thus you deceiv'd poor Blaiſe, and thus depriv'd me of my lover: this going into a convent, I find, was all a feint, a pretence; and the count's money, it ſeems, is for Philip Hombert: thou little coquette! but I am glad on't: the count's perfidiouſneſs to me deſerv'd this return: I thought indeed Nanine's heart was as mean as her birth, and now I am ſatisfy'd of it.

SCENE VIII.

The COUNT, BARONESS.

BARONESS.

But here comes the philoſopher, the ſentimental count d'Olban, the wife lover, the man above prejudice: your ſervant, noble count, approach and laugh, my dear lover, at the moſt ridiculous circumſtance: do you know Philip Hombert, of Remival? but, to be ſure, you can't be a ſtranger to your — rival.

COUNT.

What is all this, pray?

BARONESS.

This billet perhaps will inform you: this Hombert muſt be a handſome lad.

COUNT.

You are too late, madam, now with your ſchemes; my reſolution once made, I am not to be ſhaken: be ſatisfy'd, madam, with the ſhameful trick you wanted to play me this morning.

BARONESS.

You'll find this new one a worſe, I believe: there, read: [*Gives him the letter*] you'll like it vaſtly: you know

know the hand, and you know the virtue of the dear nymph that has ſubdued you: [*Whilſt he is reading it he ſeems confounded, grows pale, and angry*] well, ſir, what think you of the ſtile? — he ſees nothing, ſays nothing, hears nothing: poor man! but he deſerves it.

COUNT.

Did I read aright? it cannot be. I am aſtoniſh'd, thunder-ſtruck; ungrateful ſex! perfidious creature!

BARONESS. [Aſide.

I know his temper well; naturally violent, quick and reſolute: he'll do ſomething immediately.

SCENE IX.

The COUNT, BARONESS, GERMON.

GERMON.

Yonder comes madam Olban: ſhe's in the avenue already.

BARONESS.

Is the old woman return'd?

GERMON.

Sir, ſir, my lady, your mother, is coming.

BARONESS.

His anger has taken away his hearing: the letter operates finely.

GERMON. [Bawling out to him.

Sir.

COUNT.

Does ſhe think ——

GERMON. [Aloud.

My lady, ſir, your mother.

COUNT.

What is Nanine doing at this inſtant?

GERMON.

Writing in her own apartment — but, ſir ——

COUNT. [With an air of coolneſs.

Go, ſeize her papers; bring me what ſhe writes, and then let her be ſent away.

GERMON.

Who, ſir?

COUNT.

Nanine.

GERMON.

I can never have the heart to do it, ſir: O, ſir, if you knew how ſhe charms us all, ſo noble, ſo good!

COUNT.

Do it, ſir, or ſee my face no more.

GERMON.

I obey, ſir.

[He goes out.

SCENE

SCENE. X.

The COUNT, BARONESS.

BARONESS.

Now, the day is ours: I give you joy, ſir, of your return to reaſon: now, ſir, is not it true as I told you, the low-bred always retain ſomething of their former condition, and perſons of family alone have hearts truly noble? Blood, ſir, let me tell you, does every thing, and meanneſs of birth will inſpire Nanine with ſentiments you never ſuſpected her of.

COUNT.

That I don't believe: but come, we'll talk no more about it, but endeavour to make amends for paſt errors: every man has his follies, at ſome part of his life; we all go wrong; and he is leaſt to blame who repents the ſooneſt.

BARONESS.

'Tis well obſerv'd.

COUNT.

Never mention her to me again: be ſilent on that head, I entreat you.

BARONESS.

Moſt willingly.

COUNT.

I beg this ſubject of our diſpute may be intirely forgot.

BARONESS.

But will you remember then your former vows?

COUNT.

Well, well, I underſtand you, I will.

BARONESS.

And quickly too, or you will not repair the injury: our marriage ſo ſhamefully deferr'd is an affront —

COUNT.

That ſhall be made amends for; but, madam, we muſt have ——

BARONESS.

Have what? we muſt have a lawyer.

COUNT.

You know, madam, that —— I waited for my mother.

BARONESS.

And here ſhe comes.

SCENE

SCENE XI.

The MARCHIONESS D'OLBAN, the COUNT, BARONESS.

COUNT. [To his mother.

Madam, I ſhou'd have — [*Aſide*] O, Philip Hombert! [*To his mother*] but you have prevented me: my reſpect, and tenderneſs — [*Aſide*] with that air of innocence too! perfidious wretch!

MARCHIONESS.

Why, you rave, child; I heard indeed, as I paſs'd thro' Paris, that your head was a little touch'd, and I find there was ſome truth in it; how long has this misfortune ——

COUNT.

Good heaven! how confuſed I am!

MARCHIONESS.

Does it ſeize you often?

COUNT.

It never will again, madam.

MARCHIONESS.

I ſhould be glad to ſpeak with you alone. [*Turns to the baroneſs and makes her a formal courteſy.*] Good morrow, madam.

BARO-

BARONESS. [Aside.

The old fool? [*Turning to the Marchioneſs*] Madam, I leave you the pleaſure of entertaining the count at your leiſure, and retire.

[She goes out.

SCENE XII.

The MARCHIONESS, the COUNT.

MARCHIONESS.

[Talking very faſt, and in the manner of a little pratling old woman.]

Well, ſir, and ſo you intend to make the baroneſs my daghter-in-law: 'twas this, to tell you the truth, that brought me here ſo ſoon: ſhe's a peeviſh, impertinent, proud, opinionated creature, and one who never had the leaſt regard for me: laſt year, when I ſupp'd with the marchioneſs Agard, ſhe ſaid before all the company, I was a babbler. Lord forbid I ſhou'd ever ſup there again: a babbler! beſides I know, between you and me, ſhe is not ſo rich; and that, let me tell you, ſon, is a great point, and we ought to be well inform'd about it: they tell me that the chateau d'orme did but half of it belong to her huſband, and that the other half was diſputed by a long law-ſuit, that is not finiſh'd to this day: that I had from your grand--papa, and he always told truth: ay,

ay, he was a man; there are few ſuch now a'days: there is nothing now at Paris but a ſet of half-men, vain, fooliſh, impertinent coxbombs, talking upon ev'ry ſubject, and laughing at times paſt. O, their eternal clack diſtracts me, prating about new kitchens, and new faſhions: we hear of nothing now but bankrupts, and diſtreſs, and ruin: the wives, in ſhort, are licentious, and the huſbands ſimpletons: every thing grows worſe and worſe.

COUNT. [Reading the letter over again.

Who cou'd have thought it? this is a deſperate ſtroke indeed. Well, Germon?

SCENE XIII.

The MARCHIONESS, the COUNT, GERMON.

GERMON.

Here's your lawyer, ſir.

COUNT.

O! let him wait.

GERMON.

And here's the paper, ſir, ſhe ſent you.

COUNT. [Reading.

Give it me — well, let me ſee: ſhe loves me, ſhe ſays here, and refuſes me out of — reſpect. Faithleſs woman!

woman! thou haſt not told me the true reaſon of that refuſal.

MARCHIONESS.

My ſon's head is certainly turn'd: 'tis the baroneſs's doing: love has taken away his ſenſes.

COUNT. [To Germon.

Is Nanine gone! ſhall I be rid of her?

GERMON.

Alas! ſir, ſhe has already put on her old ruſtic garb with the greateſt modeſty, and never murmur'd or complain'd.

COUNT.

Very likely ſo.

GERMON.

She bore her misfortune with the utmoſt tranquility, whilſt every body about her were in tears.

COUNT.

With tranquility, ſay'ſt thou?

MARCHIONESS.

Who are you talking about?

GERMON.

O madam, poor Nanine, ſhe is going to be driven away, and every body laments the loſs of her.

MAR-

MARCHIONESS.

To be driven away? how is this? I don't underſtand it: what! my little Nanine go! call her back again: my charming orphan! what has ſhe done, pray? why, Nanine was my preſent to you. O I remember, at ten years of age ſhe delighted every body that ſaw her: our baroneſs took her, and I ſaid then ſhe wou'd be ill-uſed; I knew it wou'd be ſo: but you never mind what I ſay, you will do every thing of your own head: but let me tell you, turning Nanine out of doors thus is a very bad action.

COUNT.

Alone, on foot, without money, without aſſiſtance!

GERMON.

O, ſir, I forgot to tell you: an old man aſk'd after you below, and ſays he wants to ſpeak to you on an affair of importance, which he can communicate to none but yourſelf: he wants to throw himſelf at your feet.

COUNT.

In my preſent unhappy ſituation of mind, am I fit to converſe with any body?

MAR-

MARCHIONESS.

Thou art uneaſy enough, I believe, child, and ſo am I too, to drive away poor Nanine, and make up a marriage which you knew wou'd be diſagreeable to me: come, it was not a wiſe thing; in three months time you will be weary of one another: I'll tell you what happen'd exactly like this to my couſin the marquis of Marmure: his wife was as ſower as verjuice, tho', by the by, yours is worſe; when they marry'd, they thought they lov'd one another, and in two months after they were parted. My lady went to live with her gallant, a fooliſh, ſharking, extravagant fop; and my lord took a vile, tricking, ridiculuos coquette! fine ſuppers, country houſes, horſes, cloaths, a raſcally ſteward, new trinkets, bought upon truſt, lawyers' contracts, intereſt-money, all together ſoon ruin'd them, and in two years both went together to the hoſpital. O, and now I think of it, I remember another ſtory, more tragical, and more extraordinary than the other, it was of a———

COUNT.

My dear mother, we muſt go in to dinner: come—cou'd I ever have ſuſpected ſuch infidelity!

MAR-

MARCHIONESS.

'Tis really dreadful: but I'll tell it you all at table: in proper time and place, ſon, it may be of great uſe to you. Away.

END of the SECOND ACT.

ACT III. SCENE I.

NANINE, cloath'd as a country girl, GERMON.

GERMON.

WE are all in tears at the thoughts of loſing you.

NANINE.

It is time to go: I've ſtaid too long already.

GERMON.

But you wont leave us for ever, I hope, and in this dreſs too?

NANINE.

Obſcurity was my firſt condition.

GERMON.

What a change! and only from this morning: to ſuffer is nothing, but to be degraded is terrible.

NANINE.

NANINE.

No, no, there are a thouſand times worſe misfortunes.

GERMON.

I admire your patience, and humility: ſurely my maſter muſt have been ill adviſ'd: our baroneſs has certainly abus'd her power: ſhe muſt have done you this injury, the count cou'd never have the heart.

GERMON.

I am indebted to him for every thing; and, if he thinks fit to baniſh me, I muſt ſubmit; his favours are his own, and he has a right to recall them.

GERMON.

Who wou'd ever have expected ſuch a change? what do you intend to do with yourſelf?

NANINE.

To retire, and repent.

GERMON.

How we ſhall all deteſt the baroneſs!

NANINE.

They have made me miſerable, but I forgive them.

GERMON.

But what ſhall I tell my maſter from you when you are gone?

NANINE.

NANINE.

Tell him, I thank him for reſtoring me to my former condition: tell him that, for ever ſenſible of his goodneſs, I ſhall forget nothing but his—cruelty.

GERMON.

You melt my very ſoul; I could leave this houſe immediately to go along with you wherever you went: but Blaiſe is before hand with us all: he will go and live with you, and we are all ready to follow him.

NANINE.

No, Germon, that I'm ſure you are not. O Germon, to be driven out in this manner, —— and by whom?

GERMON.

The devil is certainly at the bottom of this buſineſs: you are leaving us, and my maſter is going to be marry'd.

NANINE.

Marry'd, ſayſt thou? indeed? nay, then let us be gone: O he was too dangerous for me——farewell.

GERMON.

Well! after all, my maſter muſt have a cruel heart, to baniſh ſo ſweet a creature: ſhe ſeems a moſt amiable girl, but in this world one ſhou'd ſwear to nothing.

SCENE

SCÉNE II.

The COUNT, GERMON.

COUNT.

Well, is ſhe gone at laſt?

GERMON.

Yes, ſir, 'tis done.

COUNT.

I'm glad on't.

GERMON.

Then, ſir, you have a heart of iron.

COUNT.

Did Philip Hombert meet and give her his hand?

GERMON.

What Philip Hombert, ſir? alas! ſir, poor Nanine went off without a creature to give her his hand; ſhe wou'd not even accept of mine.

COUNT.

And where is ſhe gone?

GERMON.

That I know not; moſt probably to her friends.

COUNT.

Ay, at Remival, I ſuppoſe.

GERMON.

GERMON.

Yes, I believe ſhe went that road.

COUNT.

Go, Germon, immediately, and conduct her to that convent where the baroneſs was going this morning, I'll lodge her in that ſafe retreat: theſe hundred louis d'or's will ſecure her reception; carry them to her, but take care ſhe does not know they come from me: tell her 'tis a preſent from my mother: upon no account mention my name to her.

GERMON.

Very well, ſir, I ſhall obey your orders.

[He goes towards the door.

COUNT.

Germon, you ſaw her as ſhe went off?

GERMON.

I did, ſir.

COUNT.

Did ſhe ſeem dejected? did ſhe weep?

GERMON.

She behav'd ſtill better, ſir; a few tears dropp'd from her, but ſhe ſtrove as much as ſhe cou'd to repreſs them.

COUNT.

COUNT.

Did ſhe let fall any thing that betray'd her ſentiments? did you remark ——

GERMON.

What, ſir?

COUNT.

Did ſhe ſay any thing of me?

GERMON.

Yes, ſir; a great deal.

COUNT.

Tell me, then, raſcal, what did ſhe ſay?

GERMON.

That you were her maſter, her beſt and kindeſt benefactor; that ſhe ſhall forget every thing — but your cruelty.

COUNT.

Away — be ſure you take care ſhe never returns; [*Germon going out*] and hark'ee, Germon.

GERMON.

Sir.

COUNT.

One word more: remember, if, by chance, as you are conducting her, one Philip Hombert ſhou'd follow you, that you treat him in a proper manner.

GER-

GERMON.

O, ſir, I'll uſe him moſt politely, and treat him with a good drubbing, that you may depend on: I'll do the buſineſs honeſtly, I warrant you: young Hombert, you ſay?

COUNT.

The ſame.

GERMON.

Very well: I have not the honour to know him, but the firſt man I ſee will I trim moſt heartily, and afterwards make him tell me his name. [*He goes towards the door and comes back.*] This young Hombert, I'll lay my life, is ſome lover of her's, a beau, a prig, I ſuppoſe, the cock of the village. Let me alone to deal with him.

COUNT.

Do as I bid you, and immediately.

GERMON.

I thought there was ſome lover in the caſe — and Blaiſe too puts in his claim, I ſuppoſe. Ay: they always love their equals better than their maſters.

COUNT.

Be gone, I tell you.

SCENE

SCENE III.

The COUNT. [Alone.

He's in the right, and has hit on the true cauſe of my unhappineſs, but I ſhall myſelf be the puniſher of my own folly. I muſt now marry the baroneſs; it is determin'd, and I can't avoid it: 'tis dreadful; but I have deſerv'd it: 'twill at leaſt be a convenient match: ſhe's not very tractable indeed, but every man may rule, if he has a mind to it; and he who has reſolution may, at any time, be maſter in his own houſe.

SCENE. IV.

The COUNT, BARONESS, MARCHIONESS.

MARCIONESS.

Well, ſon, you are going to marry this lady here?

COUNT.

Yes, madam.

MARCHIONESS.

This night ſhe is to be your wife and my daughter-in-law?

BARONESS.

If you approve of it, madam; I ſuppoſe I ſhall have your conſent.

MARCHIONESS.

Why, I muſt give it, I think: but to-morrow I ſhall take my leave of you.

COUNT.

COUNT.

Your leave, madam, why ſo?

MARCHIONESS.

I ſhall take my Nanine with me: ſince you have thought fit to turn her out of doors, I ſhall take her under my protection: I have a match in my eye for her: I propoſe marrying her to the young chief juſtice, nephew to the attorney-general, Jean Roc Souci; he whoſe father met with that comical adventure at Corbeil; you muſt have heard of him: yes, I will take care of this poor child, I'm determin'd: ſhe is a jewel, and deſerves to be well ſet. I'll marry her off immediately. Your ſervant.

COUNT.

My dear mother, don't be in a paſſion: leave me to manage my own affairs, and let Nanine go into a convent.

BARONESS.

Indeed, madam, you may believe us, ſuch a girl as Nanine is not fit to go into a family.

MARCHIONESS.

Ha! why, what's the matter?

BARONESS.

O a little affair only.

MARCHIONESS.

But pray ——

BARONESS.

O nothing at all.

MARCHIONES.

Nothing! a great deal, I'm afraid: I underſtand you mighty well: ſome little indiſcretion I ſuppoſe: nothing more likely, for to be ſure ſhe's very handſome: Ay, ay, we are all frail; we tempt, and are tempted; the heart has its weakneſs: young girls are always a little coquettiſh: but come, it is not ſo bad as you make it; tell me fairly, what my poor child has done?

COUNT.

I tell you, madam?

MARCHIONESS.

You ſeem, after all, at the bottom to have ſome regard for the girl, and perhaps you may ——

SCENE V.

The COUNT, MARCHIONESS, BARONESS, MARIN. [Booted.

MARIN.

I've done it, ſir; it's all agreed for.

MARCHIONESS.

What's agreed for?

BARONESS.

Ay, what, ſir, what?

MARIN.

MARIN.

Why, ſir, I've done as you order'd me, ſpoke to the tradeſmen, and you'll have your equipage to-morrow.

BARONESS.

What equipage?

MARIN.

Every thing, madam, that your future ſpouſe had order'd; ſix fine horſes, and a charming berlin; I'm ſure your ladyſhip will like it; it's very fine; the pannels all varniſh'd by Martin: the diamonds too are brilliant, and well-choſen; and the new ſtuffs quite in taſte.—O nothing comes up to 'em.

BARONESS. [To the count.

And had you order'd all this?

COUNT.

I had — [*Aſide*] but for whom!

MARIN.

Every thing will come to-morrow morning in the coach, and will be ready for your wedding in the evening: O there's nothing like Paris for getting every thing at a minute's warning, if you have but money. As I came back, I call'd on the lawyer; he's juſt by, finiſhing your affair.

BARONESS.

It has hung a long time in ſuſpenſe.

MARCHIONESS. [Aſide.

I wiſh it wou'd hang theſe forty years.

MARIN.

In the hall I met a poor old man, ſighing and in tears; he has waited a long time, he ſays, and begs to ſpeak to you.

BARONESS.

An impertinent fellow! let him go about his buſineſs: he has choſe a wrong time to trouble us now.

MARCHIONESS.

Why, ſo, madam? have a little conſideration: ſon, let me tell you, it's very wrong to repulſe poor people in this manner; I have told you over and over, when you was a child, you ought to treat them with indulgence; hear what they have to ſay; be courteous, and affable to 'em: are not they men as well as yourſelf: we don't know perhaps who we affront, and may repent our hardneſs of heart: the proud never proſper. [*To Marin*] Go, ſee for that old man.

MARIN.

I will ma'am [*He goes out.*]

COUNT.

COUNT.

Forgive me, madam, my reſpects are always due to you, and I am ready to ſee this man, in ſpite of my preſent embaraſſment.

SCENE VI.

The COUNT, MARCHIONESS, BARONESS, a PEASANT.

MARCHIONESS. [To the Peaſant.

Come, come, ſpeak, don't be afraid.

PEASANT.

O, my lord, for heaven's ſake hear me; permit me to fall at your feet, and to give you back———

COUNT.

Riſe, friend; I'll not be knelt to; do not imagine me capable of ſuch pride; you ſeem to be an honeſt man, do you want employment in my family? who are you?

MARCHIONESS.

Chear up, man.

PEASANT.

Alas! ſir, I am the father of—Nanine.

COUNT.

You?

BARONESS.

Your daughter's a ſlut.

PEASANT.

This, ſir, is what I fear'd: this is the cruel ſtroke that has wounded my poor heart: I thought indeed ſo much money cou'd not fairly belong to one in her condition: we little folks ſoon loſe our integrity when we come among the great.

BARONESS.

There he's right enough: but ſtill he's a deceiver, for Nanine is not his daughter, ſhe was an orphan.

PEASANT.

It is too true, ſhe was ſo: I left her with her poor relations in her infant years, having loſt her mother, with all my fortune; oblig'd by neceſſity, I went to ſerve abroad; and as I wou'd not have her paſs for the daughter of a ſoldier, forbad her ever to mention my name.

MARCHIONESS.

Why ſo? for my part, I reſpect a ſoldier: we ſtand in need of them ſometimes.

COUNT.

What is there ſhameful in the profeſſion?

PEASANT.

It meets indeed with leſs honour than it deſerves.

COUNT.

COUNT.

The prejudice againſt them is inexcuſable. I own, I eſteem an honeſt ſoldier, who hazards his life in the defence of his king and country, much more than an important ſelf ſufficient foundrel, whoſe knaviſh induſtry ſucks up the blood of his fellow ſubjects.

MARCHIONESS.

You muſt have been in a great many battles: let me have an account of them all; I long to hear it.

PEASANT.

In my preſent unhappy condition you muſt excuſe me; let it ſuffice to inform you, that I receiv'd a thouſand promiſes of advancement; but, without friends, how was it poſſible to riſe? thrown amongſt the common croud, all I cou'd do was to diſtinguiſh myſelf, and honour my only reward.

MARCHIONESS.

You were then well born?

BARONESS.

Fye: how can you think ſo! well born indeed?

PEASANT.

No, madam: but I was born of honeſt parents, and merited—a better daughter.

MARCHIONESS.

Cou'd you have had a better?

COUNT.

Well! go on,

MARCHIONESS.

A better than Nanine?

COUNT.

Prithee, go on.

PEASANT.

My daughter, I underſtood, was brought up here, and treated in the kindeſt manner; I thought myſelf happy, and bleſs'd heaven for your goodneſs, and paternal care of her; I came to the neighbouring village, full of hopes and fears; I own I trembled for her dangerous youth; and, by this lady's intimation, find I had but too much reaſon; it has ſhock'd me to the ſoul; but I thought a hundred louis d'or's, beſides diamonds, was a treaſure too great to be fairly come by: ſhe cou'd never be miſtreſs of them, but at the expence of her innocence: the bare ſuſpicion makes me ſhudder; if it be ſo, I ſhall die with grief and ſhame: but I came as ſoon as poſſible, to give 'em you back again: they are your's, therefore, I beſeech you, take 'em: if my daughter is to blame, puniſh me, but don't ruin her.

MARCHIONESS.

O my dear ſon, I cannot bear this; it overpowers me.

BARONESS.

What is all this? a dream? a trick?

COUNT.

O! what have I done?

PEASANT. [Taking out the purſe and the letter.

Here, ſir, take 'em.

COUNT.

I take 'em! no: they were given to her, and ſhe has made a noble uſe of them: was it to you then the meſſage was deliver'd? who brought it?

PEASANT.

Your gardener, ſir, in whom Nanine ventur'd to confide.

COUNT.

Was it directed to you?

PEASANT.

It was, I own it, ſir.

COUNT.

O grief, O tenderneſs! what exceſs of virtue in them both! but now your name?—O I am loſt, diſtracted.

MARCHIONESS.

Ay, your name. What myſtery is this?

PEASANT.

Philip Hombert de Gatine.

COUNT.

O my father!

BARONESS.

What does he ſay?

COUNT.

How day breaks in upon me! I have done wrong, and I muſt make amends for it: O if you knew how culpable I have been! I have injur'd the ſublimeſt virtue. [*He ſteps aſide, and ſpeaks to one of his ſervants.*] away: fly.

BARONESS.

What is all this emotion for?

COUNT.

My coach immediately.

MARCHIONES.

Now, madam, you muſt be her protectreſs: when we have done ſuch an injury, we ſhou'd bluſh at nothing ſo much as an imperfect repentance; my ſon often has his whims, which people are too apt to miſtake for unpardonable follies; but at bottom he has a generous ſoul, and is naturally good; I can do what I

pleaſe

pleaſe with him: you, my daughter-in-law, are not ſo well-diſpos'd.

BARONESS.

I ſhall grow out of all patience: how confus'd and thoughtful he looks! what ſtrange ſcheme now is he meditating upon? well, ſir, what do you intend to do?

MARCHIONESS.

Ay, for Nanine?

BARONESS.

Make her a handſome preſent, and ſatisfy her.

MARCHIONESS.

That will be the leaſt we can do.

BARONESS.

But as to ſeeing her that I never will: ſhe ſhall not come nigh the caſtle: do you hear me?

COUNT.

Yes, I hear you.

MARCHIONESS. [Aſide.

What a heart of ſtone!

BARONESS.

Don't give my ſuſpicions cauſe to break out, ſir. Ha! you heſitate.

COUNT. [After a pauſe of ſometime.

No, madam, I am reſolv'd.

BARO-

BARONESS.

That reſpect at leaſt is owing to me; nay, to both of us.

MARCHIONESS.

And can you be ſo cruel, ſon?

BARONESS.

What ſtep do you propoſe to take?

COUNT.

'Tis taken already: you know my heart, madam, and the frankneſs of it: I muſt be plain with you: I had promis'd you my hand; but the deſign of our marriage was only to put an end to a tedious law-ſuit between us, which I will now do immediately, by willingly reſigning to you all thoſe rights and pretentions which were the foundation of it: even the intereſt ſhall be your's; I give up every thing, take, and enjoy it: if ſince we cannot be man and wife, let us at leaſt live as friends and relations: let every thing that gave mutual uneaſineſs be forgot: there is no reaſon why, becauſe we can't love, we ſhou'd hate each other.

BARONESS.

Your falſehood is what I expected: but I renounce your preſents, and yourſelf: yes, traitor, I ſee now who you mean to live with, and how low your paſſion

ſinks

ſinks you: go, and be a ſlave to her, I leave you to your unworthy choice.

[She goes out.

SCENE VII.

The COUNT, MARCHIONESS, PHILIP HOMBERT.

COUNT.

No, madam, 'tis not unworthy, my ſoul is not blinded by an idle paſſion: that virtue which it is my duty to reward ought to melt, but cannot debaſe me: what they call meanneſs in this old man conſtitutes his merit, and makes him truly noble: if I wou'd be ſo, I muſt pay the price of it: where ſouls are thus ennobled by themſelves, and diſtinguiſh'd by ſuperior characters, we ſhou'd paſs over common rules: their birth, low as it is, when attended with ſuch virtues, will make my family but more illuſtrious.

MARCHIONESS.

What are you talking about?

SCENE VIII.

The COUNT, MARCHIONESS, NANINE.

PHILIP HOMBERT.

COUNT. [To his mother.

Look at her, and gueſs.

MAR-

MARCHIONESS. [To Nanine.

My deareſt child, come to my arms: but ſhe is ſtrangely clothed, and yet how handſome ſhe looks, and modeſt too!

NANINE.

[Pays her reſpects to the Marchioneſs, and then runs to her father.

O nature demands my firſt acknowledgments, my dear father!

PHILIP HOMBERT.

O heaven! my daughter! O ſir, you have made me amends for forty years afflictions.

COUNT.

Ay, but how muſt I repair the injury I have done to ſuch exalted virtue! to come back in this dreſs, how mean it is, but ſhe adorns it; Nanine does honour to every thing: ſpeak, my Nanine, can your goodneſs pardon the affront?

NANINE.

Can you, ſir, doubt my forgiveneſs of it? I never thought, after all your bounty to me, you cou'd injure me.

COUNT.

If you have indeed forgot the wrong I did you, give me a proof of it: once more, and only once, I take upon me to command you; but this once you muſt ſwear --- to obey me.

PHILIP

PHILIP HOMBERT.

I am ſure ſhe owes it to you, and her gratitude —

NANINE. [To her father.

He need not doubt, ſir, of my obedience.

COUNT.

I ſhall depend upon it: let me tell you then, that all your duty is not yet paid: I have ſeen you on your knees to my mother, and to your own father; one thing ſtill remains for you, and that is, now, before them, to embrace—your huſband.

NANINE.

Who? I?

MARCHIONESS.

Are you in earneſt? can it be?

PHILIP HOMBERT.

O my child!

COUNT. [To his mother.

By your permiſſion, madam.

MARCHIONESS.

My dear child, the family will be in a ſtrange uproar about it.

COUNT.

O when they ſee Nanine, they muſt approve.

PHILIP

PHILIP HOMBERT.

What a ſtroke of fortune! O, ſir, I never thought you cou'd deſcend thus low.

COUNT.

You promis'd to obey, and I muſt have it ſo.

MARCHIONESS.

My ſon.

COUNT.

My happineſs, madam, depends on this important moment: intereſt alone, we know, has made a thouſand marriages; we have ſeen the wiſeſt men conſult fortune and character only: her character is irreproachable; and as to fortune, ſhe wants it not: juſtice and inclination ſhall do what avarice has ſo often done before: let me, then, madam, have your conſent, and finiſh all.

NANINE.

No, madam, you muſt not conſent; indeed you muſt not; oppoſe his paſſion, oppoſe mine: let me intreat you, do: love has blinded him, do you, madam, remove the veil: let me live far from him, and at a diſtance only adore his virtues: you know my condition; you ſee my father: can I, ought I, ever to wiſh to call you mother?

MAR-

MARCHIONESS.

Yes; you can, you ought: it is enough: I can hold out no longer: this laſt generoſity has entirely ſubdued me: it tells me how much I ought to love: it is as ſingular, as extraordinary, as Nanine herſelf.

NANINE.

Then, madam, I obey; my heart can no longer reſiſt the power of love.

MARCHIONESS.

Let this happy day be the worthy recompenſe of virtue, *but let it not be made a precedent.

End of the Third and laſt Act.

---

*——que ce jour
Soit des vertus la digne recompenſe
Mais ſans tirer jamais à conſequence.

The laſt line is intirely ſuperfluous, and ſeems indeed to overthrow the tendency of the whole piece, which wou'd certainly have ended better with the firſt; but the author wanted a verſe to anſwer the other, and was reſolv'd to throw it in, however abſurdly.

THE

BABBLER.

A

COMEDY.

Repreſented in Auguſt, 1756.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

EUPHEMIA.

DAMIS.

HORTENSIA.

TRASIMON.

CLITANDER.

NERINE.

PASQUIN.

Several Footmen belonging to Damis.

THE

*BABBLER.

A

COMEDY.

ACT I. SCENE I.

EUPHEMIA, DIMAS.

EUPHEMIA.

DON'T imagine, my dear, that, by what I'm going to ſay, I mean to exerciſe the authority of a mother, always ready as you know I am, to liſten in my turn to your reaſons when I think them good;

* This comedy is called in the original L'INDISCRET, literally tranſlated, THE INDISCREET, but our language does not admit of the adjective without the ſubſtantive; and the *Indiſcreet Man* wou'd ſound almoſt as bad: I have therefore taken the liberty to ſubſtitute another title, which perhaps may convey a more complete idea of the principal character, than the vague term of an *indiſcreet man*, which may be applied to follies of a different kind from that which the author meant to ridicule in the following piece.

my

my intention is not to lay my commands on you, but to give you my advice; it is my heart which ſpeaks to you, and that experience I have had in the world makes me foreſee evils which I wou'd endeavour to prevent: you have been at court, I think, not above two months; believe me, 'tis a dangerous ſituation: the perfidious group of courtiers always look upon a new comer with an eye of malevolence, and ſoon find out all his imperfections: from the firſt moment, they condemn him, without pity or remorſe; and, which is ſtill worſe, their judgment is irrevocable: be guarded againſt their malice: on the firſt ſtep we take in life, the reſt of it muſt in a great meaſure depend: if you once make yourſelf ridiculous, the world will think you always ſo: the impreſſion will remain: it is in vain, as you advance in years, to change your conduct, and aſſume a more ſerious behaviour: you will ſuffer a long time from old prejudices: even if we do grow better, we are ſtill ſuſpected; and I have often known men pay dearly in their old age for the errors of their youth: have a little regard therefore to the world, and remember you ought to live now more for that than for yourſelf.

DAMIS.

DAMIS.

Now cannot I poſſibly conceive what all this long reamble tends to.

EUPHEMIA.

I ſee it appears to you both abſurd and unneceſſary: ou deſpiſe thoſe things which may be of the greateſt onſequence to you; one day or other perhaps you ay believe me, when it will be too late: to be plain ith you, you are indiſcreet: my too long indulgence aſs'd over this fault in your infancy, in your riper ears I dread the effects of it: you are not without bilities, a good underſtanding, and a good heart; ut, believe me, in a world ſo full of injuſtice, virue will not make amends for vice; our faults are cenr'd on every occaſion, and perhaps the worſt we can e guilty of is indiſcretion: at court, my dear, the oſt neceſſary art is not to talk well, but to know ow to hold one's tongue: this is not the place where ociety enjoys itſelf in the freedom of eaſy converation; here they generally talk without ſaying any hing, and the moſt tireſome babblers have the beſt ucceſs: I have been long acquainted with the court, nd bad enough it is: but whilſt we live there, we ught to conform to it. With regard to the women, ou ſhou'd be remarkably cautious; talk but ſeldom

of

of them, and ſtill leſs of yourſelf; pretend to be ignorant of all they do, and all they ſay; conceal your opinion, and diſguiſe your ſentiments; but, above all, be maſter of your ſecrets: he who tells thoſe of another will always be eſteem'd a villain; and he who tells his own, be aſſur'd, will, here at leaſt, be look'd on as a fool. What have you to object to this?

DAMIS.

Nothing: I am intirely of your opinion: I abominate the character of a tattler: that is not my foible, I aſſure you: ſo far from being guilty of the vice you ſeem to reproach me with, I now fairly confeſs to you, madam, that I have a long time conceal'd a thing from you which I ought to have told you of; but in life, you know, one muſt ſometimes diſſemble. I love, and am belov'd, by a moſt charming widow, young, rich, and handſome, as prudent as ſhe is amiable; in a word, it is Hortenſia: judge, madam, yourſelf of my happineſs; judge, if it were known, how miſerable it wou'd make all our courtiers, who are ſighing for her: we have conceal'd our mutual paſſion from every one of them: this engagement has been made now for theſe two whole days paſt, and you knew nothing of it.

EUPHE-

EUPHEMIA.

But I have been at Paris all that time.

DAMIS.

O, madam, never was man ſo happy in his choice: the more you approve of it, the more ſatisfaction ſhall I feel, and the more pleaſure in my purſuit of her.

EUPHEMIA.

I am ſure, Damis, the confidence you repoſe in me, is a mark of your friendſhip, and not of your imprudence.

DAMIS.

I hope you never doubted that.

EUPHEMIA.

But ſeriouſly, Damis, you ſhou'd reflect on the proſpect of happineſs before you: Hortenſia, I know, has charms, but, beſides that, ſhe is the beſt match that cou'd have offer'd itſelf in all France.

DAMIS.

I know ſhe is.

EUPHEMIA.

She is intirely her own miſtreſs, and can chooſe for herſelf.

DAMIS.

So much the better.

EUPHEMIA.

You muſt take care how you manage her, mark her inclinations, and flatter them.

DAMIS.

O, I can do better: I know how to pleaſe her.

EUPHEMIA.

Well ſaid, Damis: but remember, ſhe's not fond of noiſe and buſtle; no bluſtering or flaſhy airs will be agreeable to her: ſhe may, like other women, have her foibles, but even in love-matters ſhe'll always act with diſcretion: above all, let me adviſe you, not to ſhew off in public with her, nor appear at court together, as if on purpoſe to be ſtared at, and become the topic of the day: ſecret and myſtery is all her taſte.

DAMIS.

And yet the affair muſt be known at laſt.

EUPHEMIA.

But, pray, what lucky accident introduc'd you to her? ſhe never admits young men to her toilette; but, like a prudent woman, carefully avoids the croud of wild ſparks that are perpetually after her.

DAMIS.

DAMIS.

To tell you the truth, I have never been at her houſe yet: but I have ogled her a long time, and, thank heaven, with ſucceſs: at firſt ſhe ſent back my letters unopen'd, but ſoon after read them, and now writes to me again: for near two days paſt I have had ſtrong hopes, and, in a word, intend this very night to have a *tête à tête* with her.

EUPHEMIA.

Well: I think I'll go and ſee her too: the mother of a lover who is well-receiv'd, cannot, I imagine, but be agreeable to her. I may contrive to ſpeak of you, and prevail on her to haſten the match, on which I ſhall tell her your happineſs depends: get her conſent, and make her your's as ſoon as you can; I'll do my beſt to aſſiſt you: but ſpeak of it to nobody elſe, I charge you.

DAMIS.

No, madam: never was mother more tender and affectionate, or friendſhip more ſincere; and to pleaſe her ſhall, for the future, be my firſt ambition.

EUPHEMIA.

All that I deſire of you is, to be happy.

SCENE II.

DAMIS alone.

My mother's right: addreſs and cunning are abſolutely neceſſary in this world; there is no ſucceeding without them. I am reſolv'd to diſſemble with the whole court, except ten or a dozen friends, whom I may talk freely with: but firſt, by way of trial of my prudence, let me tell my ſecrets to myſelf a little, and conſider, now nobody's by, what fortune has beſtow'd upon me. I hate vanity, but there's no harm in knowing one's ſelf, and doing ourſelves juſtice: I have ſome wit, am agreeable, well receiv'd at court, and thought, I believe, by ſome, to be admitted to the king's private hours: then, I am certainly very handſome, can dance, ſing, drink, and diſſemble with the beſt of 'em: made a colonel at thirteen, I have reaſon to hope for a ſtaff at thirty; happy in what I have, and with a good proſpect before me; I'll keep Julia, and marry Hortenſia; when I have poſſeſs'd her charms, I'll be guilty every day of a thouſand infidelities, but all with prudence and œconomy, and without ever being ſuſpected as a rambler: in ſix months time I ſhall make away with half her fortune, and

enjoy

enjoy all the court by turns, without her knowing any thing of the matter.

SCENE III.

DAMIS, TRASIMON.

DAMIS.

Good morrow, governor.

TRASIMON. [Aſide.

Hang him for coming acroſs me.

DAMIS.

My dear governor, let me embrace thee.

TRASIMON.

Excuſe me, ſir, but I really ——

DAMIS.

Poſitively I will: come, come—

TRASIMON.

Well, what, what do you want?

DAMIS.

Nay, don't frown ſo, man, pry'thee unbend a little: I am the happieſt of mortals.

TRASIMON.

I came to tell you, ſir ——

DAMIS.

O, by heavens, you kill me with that hard frozen face of yours.

TRASIMON.

I can't help it, ſir, nor can I ſmile at preſent, for, let me tell you, you have got a bad affair upon your hands.

DAMIS.

Not ſo very bad, ſure.

TRASIMON.

Erminia and Valere exclaim violently againſt you: you have ſpoke of them, it ſeems, too lightly, and old lord Horace too deſir'd me to tell you ——

DAMIS.

O, a mighty matter indeed to be uneaſy about! Horace an old lord? an old fool, a proud coxcomb, puffed up with notions of falſe honour, low enough at court, he puts on an air of importance in the city, and is as ignorant as he wou'd fain ſeem knowing: as for madam Erminia, it's pretty well known I had her, and left her abruptly, an ill natur'd buſy-body; I believe you know a little of her lover, my friend, Valere; did you ever remember ſuch a ſtarch'd, affected, ſtrain'd, left-handed underſtanding? O, by the

the by, I was told yeſterday in confidence, that his huge elder brother, that important creature, is well-receiv'd by Clarice, and the fat counteſs is burſting with ſpleen and diſappointment. Well but, my old commandant, how go your love affairs?

TRASIMON.

You know I don't trouble myſelf much about the ſex.

DAMIS.

That's not my caſe; for I do, and i'faith, both in court and city, they keep me pretty well employ'd: but liſten, whilſt I intruſt you with a ſecret, on which the happineſs of my life depends.

TRASIMON.

Can I ſerve you in it?

DAMIS.

No: not in the leaſt.

TRASIMON.

Then pray tell me nothing about it.

DAMIS.

O but the rights of friendſhip——

TRASIMON.

'Tis that very friendſhip which makes me ſhrink from the weight of a ſecret which is entruſted to me,

not out of real regard, but from mere folly and weakneſs, which any body elſe might keep as well as myſelf; which is generally attended with a thouſand ſuſpicions, and may chance to give us both a great deal of uneaſineſs, me for knowing, and you for ſaying more than we ought.

DAMIS.

Say what you will about it, captain, I muſt let you have the pleaſure of reading this billet-doux, which this very day———

TRASIMON.

What a ſtrange humour———

DAMIS.

You'll ſay it's written with a great deal of tenderneſs.

TRASIMON.

Well, if you inſiſt upon it———

DAMIS.

'Tis dictated by love itſelf: you'll ſee how fond ſhe is of me: 'tis the hand that wrote it which makes it ſo valuable: but you ſhall ſee it: zounds, I've loſt it; poſitively I can't find it—hola, la Fleur, la Brie.

SCENE

SCENE IV.

DAMIS, TRASIMON, Several Footmen.

FOOTMAN.

Did you call, ſir?

DAMIS.

Step immediately into the gallery, and bring me all the letters I receiv'd this morning: go to the old duke, and—O here it is, the blundering raſcals had put it there by miſtake. [*To the footmen*] you may go. Now, you ſhall ſee it; mind now, I beg you'll attend.

SCENE V.

DAMIS, TRASIMON, CLITANDER, PASQUIN.

CLITANDER, with a letter in his hand, ſpeaking to Paſquin.

Stay you, Paſquin, in this garden all day; be ſure you mark every thing that paſſes; obſerve Hortenſia well; and bring me an account of every ſtep ſhe takes: I ſhall know then———

SCENE VI.

DAMIS, TRASIMON, CLITANDER.

DAMIS.

O here comes the marquis: good morrow, marquis.

CLITANDER. [A letter in his hand.

Morrow to you.

DAMIS.

Why, what's the matter with you to-day, with that long melancholy face? what the deuce ails you all? every creature I ſee looks gloomy and diſmal to-day, I think; but I ſuppoſe———

CLITANDER. [Aſide.

I have but too much reaſon.

DAMIS.

What are you muttering about?

CLITANDER. [In a low voice.

What a poor unhappy creature I am!

DAMIS.

Come, to give you both a little ſpirit, ſuppoſe I read you this little billet of mine, ha, marquis?

CLITANDER. [Aſide, looking at the letter.

What letter? can it be? ſurely 'tis from Hortenſia: cruel creature!

DAMIS. [To Clitander.

'Tis a letter wou'd make a rival hang himſelf.

CLITANDER.

You are indeed a happy man, if you are belov'd.

DAMIS.

DAMIS.

That I moſt aſſuredly am; but you ſhall hear; your city ladies don't write in this ſtile: obſerve her. [*He reads*] "At length I yield to the paſſion which has "taken poſſeſſion of my heart; I wou'd have con- "ceal'd it, but 'tis impoſſible: why ſhou'd I not write "what my eyes, no doubt, have a thouſand times in- "form'd you of? yes, my deareſt Damis, I own I "love you; the more perhaps becauſe my heart, fear- "ful of your youth, and fearful of itſelf, for a long "time reſiſted my inclination, and told me I ought "not to love you. After the confeſſion of ſuch a "weakneſs, ought I not for ever to reproach myſelf "for it? but the more frankly I avow my tenderneſs "for you, with the more care you ought to conceal it."

TRASIMON.

You take care, I ſee, to obey the lady's commands moſt punctually: a mighty diſcreet lover, to be ſure!

CLITANDER.

Happy is that man who receives ſuch letters, and never ſhews them.

DAMIS.

Well, what do you think of it? is not it——

TRA-

TRASIMON.

Very ſtrong indeed.

CLITANDER.

Charming.

DAMIS.

And the writer a thouſand times more ſo. O if you did but know her name! but in this wicked world we muſt have a little diſcretion.

TRASIMON

Well, we don't deſire you to tell us.

CLITANDER.

You and I Damis love one another very well, but prudence ———

TRASIMON.

So far from deſiring you to acquaint us with particulars, that ———

DAMIS.

Come, come, I love you both too well to diſſemble with you: I know, you think, and the whole court has proclaim'd it, that I have no affair here with any body but Julia.

CLITANDER.

Nay, they have it from yourſelf; but as to us, we don't believe a word of it.

DAMIS.

DAMIS.

To be ſure, there was ſomething between us, and the affair went on tolerably well till now: we lov'd one another, and then we parted, and then we met again; all the world knows that.

CLITANDER.

The world, I aſſure you, knows nothing at all about it.

DAMIS.

You think I'm very fond of her ſtill, but you're miſtaken; upon honour I am not.

TRASIMON.

'Tis nothing to me, whether you are or are not.

DAMIS.

Julia is handſome, that ſhe is; but then ſhe's fickle: the other, O the other is the very thing.

CLITANDER.

Well, and this charming woman———

DAMIS.

Come, I ſee you will know, and I muſt tell you: my dear friend, look at this picture, only look at it: did you ever ſee two ſuch eyes? the moſt charming, moſt adorable creature; painted by Mace; that you know

know is ſaying every thing; you know the features, dont you?

CLITANDER.

O heav'n! 'tis Hortenſia.

DAMIS.

You ſeem ſurpriz'd.

TRASIMON.

You forget, ſir, that Hortenſia is my couſin, that ſhe is tender of her honour, and a declaration of this kind———

DAMIS.

O give her up, give her up, man; why, I have ſix couſins; you ſhall have 'em all: make up to 'em, ogle 'em, deceive 'em, deſert 'em, print their love-letters, with all my heart, it will give me no uneaſineſs: we ſhou'd have enough to do indeed to be out of humour with one another, to vindicate the honour of our couſins: it's very well here, if every one can anſwer for themſelves.

TRASIMON.

But Hortenſia, ſir———

DAMIS.

Is the woman I adore; and I tell you again, ſir, ſhe loves me, and me only; and to make you more angry, I intend to marry her.

CLI-

CLITANDER. [Aſide.

Cou'd I have been more cruelly injur'd?

DAMIS.

Our wedding will be no ſecret, but you ſhan't be there—couſin.

TRASIMON.

A couſin, ſir, may have ſome power over her, and that you ſhall know ſoon. Your ſervant, ſir.

SCENE VII.

DAMIS, CLITANDER.

DAMIS.

How I deteſt that fellow! the ridiculous pedant, with his affected airs of romantic virtue; a tedious, heavy, tireſome brute! you ſeem to be mighty curious about that picture, and examine it cloſely.

CLITANDER. [Aſide.

I muſt be maſter of myſelf, and diſſemble.

DAMIS.

You may obſerve perhaps, one of the brilliants is miſſing at the corner there: I was a long chace yeſterday, and there was ſuch joſtling and puſhing one another; you muſt know I had four pictures looſe in my pocket, and this unfortunately met with a miſchance; the

the caſe broke, and a brilliant dropp'd out: as you go to town to-morrow, you may call at Frénaye's, he's dear, but clever in his way: I wiſh you'd chuſe a diamond at his ſhop, as if it was for yourſelf; for, between you and me, I owe him a few pounds: here, take the picture, but don't ſhew it to any body. Your ſervant.

CLITANDER. [Aſide.

Where am I?

DAMIS.

Well, God be wi'you, Marquis, I ſhall depend upon you. Take care, be diſcreet now.

CLITANDER. [Aſide.

Can he poſſibly do it?

DAMIS. [Returning.

I love a diſcreet friend: you ſhall be my confidant: I'll tell you all my ſecrets. Is it poſſible for a man to be happy, to poſſeſs every thing his heart can wiſh for, and not tell it to another? where's the joy of keeping our inſipid pleaſures to ourſelves? one may as well have no friends as not truſt 'em, and happineſs uncommunicated is no happineſs at all: I have ſhewn you a letter, and a picture, but that's not all.

CLI-

CLITANDER.

Why, what elſe have you?

DAMIS.

Do you know that this very night I am to meet her.

CLITANDER. [Aſide.

O dreadful! horrible!

DAMIS.

To night, Clitander, before the ball is over, alone and unſuſpected, I am to meet her by appointment in this garden.

CLITANDER. [Aſide.

O I am loſt, undone: this laſt cruel ſtroke —

DAMIS.

Is not that charming, my friend? doſt not rejoice with me, boy?

CLITANDER.

And will Hortenſia meet you?

DAMIS.

Moſt certainly; juſt at duſk I expect her; but the declining ſun already gives me notice of my approaching happineſs: I muſt be gone. I'll go to your lodgings, I think, and dreſs; let me ſee, I muſt have two pounds of powder for my hair, and ſome of the moſt exquiſite perfume; then will I return in triumph, and finiſh the affair

affair immediately. Do you, in the mean time, prowl about here, that you may have ſome ſhare in the happineſs of your friend; I ſhall leave you here as my deputy, to keep off impertinent rivals.

SCENE VIII.

CLITANDER. Alone.

How hard a taſk it was to conceal my grief and my reſentment! after a whole year of ſincereſt paſſion, when Hortenſia's heart, weary'd of reſiſtance, began at length to ſoften and relent, for Damis thus to come and change her in an inſtant! one fortunate moment has done what my long and faithful ſervices in vain ſolicited: nay, ſhe even prevented his wiſhes, gave this young coxcomb that picture which I had ſo much better deſerv'd: ſhe writes to him too! O that letter wou'd have kill'd me with extacy: and then, to make my miſery compleat, ſhe has writ to me this morning, never to ſee her more: this hair-brain'd fellow has got hold of her heart, and will carry her off in triumph: O Hortenſia, how cruelly haſt thou deceiv'd me!

SCENE

SCENE IX.

CLITANDER, PASQUIN.

CLITANDER.

So, Paſquin, I have found out my rival.

PASQUIN.

Indeed, ſir? ſo much the worſe.

CLITADNER.

Yes: ſhe's in love with that blockhead, Damis.

PASQUIN.

Who told you ſo?

CLITANDER.

Himſelf: the proud coxcomb boaſted to me of the treaſure he had ſtolen from me. Here, Paſquin, look at this picture; out of mere vanity he has left it in my hands, only that he may triumph the more. O Hortenſia, who cou'd ever have believ'd that Damis would ſupplant Clitander!

PASQUIN.

Damis is a good pretty fellow.

CLITANDER. [Collaring him.

Ha! raſcal, an impertinent young fool, that——

PASQUIN.

PASQUIN.

Very true, ſir, and perhaps — but, for heaven's ſake, don't ſtrangle me, ſir: between you and I, ſir, he's nothing but a babbler, a prig.——

CLITANDER.

Be he what he will, ſhe prefers him to me, Paſquin; therefore now is the time to exert thy uſual ſkill, and ſerve me: Hortenſia and my rival are to meet this night in the garden, by appointment; find out ſome method, if poſſible, to prevent it.

PASQUIN.

But, ſir.——

CLITANDER.

Thy brain, I know, is fertile; take money as much as thou wilt: for heaven's ſake diſappoint my rival: whilſt he is tricking out his inſignificant perſon, we may rob him of the happy moment: ſince he is a fool, let us take the advantage of his folly, and by ſome means or other keep him away from this place.

PASQUIN.

And this you think mighty eaſy to be done: why, ſir, I wou'd ſooner engage to ſtop the courſe of a river, a ſtag upon a heath, or a bird in the air, a mad poet repeating his own verſes, a litigious woman that has a ſuit in chancery, a parſon hunting after a benefice, a high-

high-wind, a tempeſt, or thunder and lightning, than a young coxcomb going to a rendezvous with his miſtreſs.

CLITANDER.

And will you then abandon me to deſpair?

PASQUIN.

Stay: a thought is juſt come into my head: let me ſee, Hortenſia and Damis have never ſeen me?

CLITANDER.

Never.

PASQUIN.

You have got her picture?

CLITANDER.

I have.

PASQUIN.

Good: and you have got a letter that ſhe wrote you.

CLITANDER.

Ay, and a cruel one it is.

PASQUIN.

Her ladyſhip's orders I think to you, never to viſit her again.

CLITANDER.

It is ſo.

PASQUIN.

The letter is without a direction I think?

CLITANDER.

It is, raſcal, and what of that?

PASQUIN.

PASQUIN.

Give me the picture and the letter immediately; give them me, I ſay.

CLITANDER.

Shall I give a picture into other hands that was entruſted to my care?

PASQUIN.

Come, come, no ceremony: a pretty ſcruple indeed? give 'em me.

CLITANDER.

Well, but, Paſquin ——

PASQUIN.

Leave every thing to me, and rely on my diſcretion.

CLITANDER.

You want to ——

PASQUIN.

Away, away: here comes Hortenſia.

SCENE X.

HORTENSIA, NERINE.

HORTENSIA.

What you ſay, Nerine, is very true, Clitander is a worthy man; I know the warmth of his paſſion for me, and the ſincerity of it: he is ſober, ſenſible, conſtant, and diſcreet: I ought to eſteem him, and ſo I do;

do; but Damis is my taſte: I find, by the ſtruggles of my own heart, that love is not always the reward of virtue; we are always won by an agreeable outſide; and for one who is captivated by the perfections of the ſoul, a thouſand are caught by the eye; I bluſh at my own inconſtancy: but Damis comes no more here, I aſſure you.

NERINE.

What a ſtrange humour this is! how reſolute you are!

HORTENSIA.

No: I ought not to be there firſt, and poſitively I will not.

NERINE.

Are you afraid of the firſt meeting?

HORTENSIA.

To tell you the truth, Damis takes up all my thoughts: this very day I have had a viſit from his mother, who has greatly increas'd my prejudices in favour of her ſon: I ſee ſhe is extremely eager for the match, and preſſes it in the warmeſt manner: but I want to ſee the man himſelf in private, and ſound his real ſentiments.

NERINE.

You have no doubt of his regard for you?

HOR-

HORTENSIA.

None: I believe, nay I know he loves me; but I want to hear him tell me ſo a thouſand and a thouſand times over: I want to ſee if he deſerves my love, to know his temper, his character, and his heart: I wou'd not yield blindly to inclination, but judge of him, if I cou'd, without paſſion or prejudice.

SCENE XI.

HORTENSIA, NERINE, PASQUIN.

PASQUIN.

Madam, my maſter Damis has ſent me here to acquaint you privately—

HORTENSIA.

Is not he coming himſelf?

PASQUIN.

No, madam.

NERINE.

The little villain!

HORTENSIA.

Not come to me?

PASQUIN.

No, madam: but, as in point of honour he thinks himſelf oblig'd, he has ſent you back this portrait.

HORTENSIA.

My picture!

PASQUIN.

PASQUIN.

Pleaſe to take it, madam.

HORTENSIA.

Am I awake?

PASQUIN.

Pray, ma'am, make haſte, for I am really in a hurry: I have two more pictures to carry back for my maſter, and two to receive: and ſo, madam, till we meet again, I am your moſt obſequious ——

HORTENSIA.

Perfidious wretch! I ſhall die with grief.

PASQUIN.

He deſir'd me moreover, madam, to inform you, that you need not ogle him any more, and that for the future he ſhou'd be glad if you wou'd find out ſome other dupe to laugh at beſides himſelf.

SCENE XII.

HORTENSIA, NERINE, DAMIS, PASQUIN.

DAMIS. [At the further end of the ſtage.

Here I am to meet the dear object of my wiſhes.

PASQUIN.

Ha! Damis! then I am caught; but I'll take courage however, and proceed: [*he runs up to Damis and takes him aſide.*] I belong, ſir, to lady Hortenſia,

and have the honour to be employed on her little affairs; I have, ſir, here a billet-doux for you.

HORTENSIA.

What a change is here! what a reward for my tender paſſion!

DAMIS. [Reads.

Let me ſee, ha! how's this? "You deſerve my "regard, I know the eſteem that is due to your vir-"tues, but I cannot love you." Was ever ſuch abominable perfidy? this is what I little expected indeed; but it ſhall be known; the public ſhall be acquainted with it: it ſhall be no ſecret at court, I can aſſure her.

HORTENSIA. [At the other part of the ſtage.

Could he carry his infamous perfidy ſo far as this?

DAMIS.

There, madam, you ſee what value I ſet on your correſpondence. [*He tears the letter.*

PASQUIN. [Running up to Hortenſia.

O madam, I bluſh for his behaviour: you ſaw him tear the latter, which you condeſcended to write to the ungrateful man.

HORTENSIA.

He has ſent back my picture: periſh, thou wretched image of my ineffectual charms!

[She throws down the picture.

PASQUIN.

PASQUIN. [Coming back to Damis.

* There, ſir, you ſee how ſhe treats you; ſhe has thrown away your picture, and broke it in pieces.

DAMIS.

There are ſome ladies in the world who receive the original in a very different manner, I can aſſure her.

HORTENSIA.

O, Nerine, what a regard I had for this ungrateful man! Tell me, fellow, [*Speaking to Paſquin, and giving him money.*] for whoſe ſake is it I am thus deſerted? to what happy object am I ſacrific'd?

PASQUIN.

O, madam, to five or ſix beauties, whom he pretends to be in love with, though he cares as little for them as for yourſelf; but your moſt dangerous rival is the fair Julia.

---

* Paſquin's ſcheme of deceiving them both by the letter and picture is well imagin'd: but the execution of it very awkwardly and inartificially conducted: his running backwards and forwards from one to the other, the lover and his miſtreſs being both on the ſtage together, whilſt the deceit is carry'd on againſt them, together with the abſurdity of leaving them together afterwards without coming to an eclairciſſement, are all circumſtances to the laſt degree abſurd and improbable. Voltaire's comedies, tho' they have ſome merit, are not excellent, and this is one of the pooreſt of them.

DAMIS. [Coming up to Paſquin.

Here, take this ring, and now, tell me honeſtly, on what impertinent court fool your ſweet miſtreſs has fix'd her affections.

PASQUIN.

No one, ſir, deſerves her ſo well as yourſelf; but, to tell you the truth, there is a certain young abbé who ogles her perpetually; not to mention that I frequently help her couſin Traſimon over the garden-wall of an evening.

DAMIS.

I'm glad on't: this is excellent news; I'll put it into a ballad.

HORTENSIA.

The worſt of it is, Nerine, that to make me ſtill more unhappy, this affair will make a noiſe in the world, and I ſhall be horribly expos'd: come, let us be gone, I will retire, and hide my tears.

PASQUIN. [To Hortenſia.

You have no more commands for me, madam? [*To Damis.*] Can I be of any further ſervice to you, ſir? Heaven preſerve you both!

ACT

SCENE XIII.

HORTENSIA, DAMIS, NERINE.

HORTENSIA. [Returning,

Why do I ſtay in this place?

DAMIS.

I ought to be dancing at the ball now.

HORTENSIA.

He ſeems thoughtful, but 'tis not on my account.

DAMIS.

I am miſtaken, or ſhe looks this way; I'll e'en make up to her.

HORTENSIA.

I'll avoid him.

DAMIS.

O, ſtay, Hortenſia, can you fly me, can you avoid me? cruel perfidious woman!

HORTENSIA.

Ungrateful man, leave me to myſelf, and let me try to hate you.

DAMIS.

That, madam, will be an eaſy taſk, thanks to your infidelity.

HORTENSIA.

'Tis what I ought to do: 'tis but my duty now, thanks to your injuſtice.

DAMIS.

And are we met at laſt, Hortenſia, but to quarrel?

HORTENSIA.

How can Damis talk thus, and at the ſame time affront me, and love another! O, Julia, Julia!

DAMIS.

After your writing me ſuch a letter, madam ——

HORTENSIA.

After your ſending back my picture, ſir ——

DAMIS.

Cou'd I ſend back your picture? cruel woman!

HORTENSIA.

Cou'd I ever write a line to you that was not full of love and tenderneſs? perfidious man!

DAMIS.

Madam, I will conſent to leave the court, to give up the poſts I enjoy, and all my hopes of future preferment, to be deſpis'd, and condemn'd by the whole world, if ever I ſent you back the picture, the precious treaſure which love entruſted to my care.

HOR-

HORTENSIA.

And may I never be lov'd by the dear charmer of my ſoul, if I ever ſent you that letter! but here, here, ungrateful man, is the picture your inſolence return'd me, the reward of tender friendſhip, which you deſpis'd: 'tis here, and can you ——

DAMIS.

Ha! here comes Clitander.

SCENE XIV.

HORTENSIA, DAMIS, CLITANDER, NERINE, PASQUIN.

DAMIS.

My dear marquis, come here; where are you going? He, madam, will unravel all.

HORTENSIA.

Clitander? why, what does he know of the matter?

DAMIS.

Don't be alarm'd, madam, he is my friend, to whom I have open'd my whole heart: he is my confidant, let him be your's too: you muſt, indeed you muſt.

HORTENSIA.

Let us be gone this moment, Nerine: O, heav'n! what a ridiculous creature!

SCENE XV.

DAMIS, CLITANDER, PASQUIN.

DAMIS.

O, marquis, I am the moſt unhappy of men; let me ſpeak to you; I muſt follow her: obſerve me. [*To Hortenſia.*] Stay, Hortenſia; nay, then I muſt after her.

SCENE XVI.

CLITANDER, PASQUIN.

CLITANDER.

I don't know what to think of it, Paſquin; I underſtood, by what you told me, that they had quarrel'd.

PASQUIN.

I thought ſo too: I'm ſure I play'd my part: moſt certainly they have cauſe to hate one another; but, for aught I know, a minute's time may reconcile them again.

CLITANDER.

Let us obſerve which way they turn.

PASQUIN.

Hortenſia ſeems as if ſhe was going to her own houſe.

CLI-

CLITANDER.

Damis follows her close: by his being behind, however, it looks as if she shunn'd him.

PASQUIN.

She flies but slowly, and the lover pursues.

CLITANDER.

She turns her head back, and Damis talks to her, but to no purpose.

PASQUIN.

I fancy not, but Damis stops her often.

CLITANDER.

He kneels to her, but she treats him with contempt.

PASQUIN.

O, but observe, now she looks tenderly upon him: if so, you're undone.

CLITANDER.

She is gone into her own house, and has dismiss'd him: joy and fear, hope and despair, at once surround me; I can't imagine how it will end.

SCENE XVII.

CLITANDER, DAMIS, PASQUIN.

DAMIS.

O, my dear marquis, I'm glad you're here; for heaven's ſake, inform me, what can be the meaning that Hortenſia forbids my coming nigh her? how happens it that the picture, which I truſted to you, is now in her hands? anſwer me.

CLITANDER.

You amaze and confound me.

DAMIS. [To Paſquin.

As for you, ſir raſcal there, the ſervant of Hortenſia, at leaſt the pretended one, I'll make an end of you this moment.

PASQUIN. [To Clitander.

Protect me, ſir.

CLITANDER, [To Damis.

Well, ſir——

DAMIS.

'Tis in vain——

CLITANDER.

Spare this poor fellow, let me intreat you, do.

DAMIS.

What intereſt have you in him?

CLI-

CLITANDER.

I beg it of you, and ſeriouſly.

DAMIS.

Out of regard to you, I will withold my reſentment; but tell me, ſcoundrel, the whole black contrivance.

PASQUIN.

O, ſir, 'tis a moſt myſterious affair; but I'll let you into ſome ſurprizing ſecrets, if you'll promiſe not to reveal 'em.

DAMIS.

I'll promiſe nothing, and inſiſt on knowing all.

PASQUIN.

You ſhall, ſir, but Hortenſia is coming this way, and will overhear us. [*To Clitander.*] Come, ſir, let us to the maſquerade, and there I'll tell you every thing.

SCENE XVIII.

TRASIMON, NERINE, HORTENSIA, in a domino, with a maſque in her hand.

TRASIMON.

Take my word for it, Hortenſia, this young coxcomb will cover us with ſhame and ignominy, to ſhew your letters and your picture about in this public man-

ner:

ner: 'tis intolerable: I ſaw them myſelf; but I'll puniſh the ſcoundrel as he deſerves.

HORTENSIA. [To Nerine.

Is Julia then ſo beautiful in his eyes? do you think he's really in love with her?

TRASIMON.

No matter whether he is or no: but, if he diſhonours you, it concerns me nearly; I know a relation's duty, and will perform it.

HORTENSIA. [To Nerine.

Do you imagine he is engag'd to Julia? give me your opinion.

NERINE.

One may know that eaſily enough from himſelf.

HORTENSIA.

O, Nerine, he was exceſſively indiſcreet; I ought to hate, yet perhaps ſtill love him. O, how he wept, and ſwore he lov'd, that he ador'd me, and that he wou'd conceal our mutual paſſion!

TRASIMON.

There, I'm ſure, he promis'd more than he will perform.

HOR-

HORTENSIA.

For the laſt time, however, I mean to try him: he's gone to the maſquerade, there I ſhall be ſure to find him: you muſt diſſemble, Nerine: go and tell him that Julia expects him here with impatience: this maſque at leaſt will hide my bluſhes: the faithleſs man will take me for Julia: I ſhall know what he thinks of her, and of myſelf: on this meeting will depend my choice or my contempt of him. [*To Troſmon.*] You muſt not be far off: endeavour, if you can, to keep Clitander near you: wait for me here, or hereabouts, and I will call you when there is occaſion.

SCENE XIX.

HORTENSIA alone, in a domino, with a maſque in her hand.

At length it is time to fix my wavering affections; under the cover of this maſque, and the name of Julia, I ſhall know whether his indiſcretion was owing to exceſs of love, or vanity; whether I ought to pardon, or to deteſt him: but here he comes.

SCENE

SCENE XX.

HORTENSIA, maſqued, DAMIS.

DAMIS. [Not ſeeing Hortenſia.

This ſeems to be the favourite ſpot for ladies to make their aſſignations in: well, I'll follow the faſhion: faſhion, in France, determines every thing, regulates precedency, honour, good-breeding, merit, wit, and pleaſure.

HORTENSIA. [Aſide.

The coxcomb!

DAMIS.

If this affair of mine cou'd but be known, in two year's time the whole court wou'd run mad for love of me: a good ſetting out here is every thing; then Ægle, and Doris, and—O there's no counting them, ſuch a groupe, ſuch a ſweet proſpect! O the pretty creatures———

HORTENSIA. [Aſide.

Light vain man!

DAMIS.

O Julia, is it you? I know you in ſpite of that envious maſk: my heart cannot be miſtaken; come, come, my dear Julia, take off that cruel veil that hides thy beauties from me; do not, in pity do not, conceal thoſe ſweet looks, thoſe tender ſmiles, that were meant

to

to reward that love which they inſpir'd; thou art the only woman upon earth whom I adore.

HORTENSIA.

Let me tell you, Damis, you are a ſtranger to my humour and diſpoſition; I ſhou'd deſpiſe a heart that never felt for any woman but myſelf; I like my lovers ſhou'd be more faſhionable; that twenty young flirts ſhou'd be hunting after him; that his paſſion for me ſhou'd draw him away from a hundred contending beauties; I muſt have ſome noble ſacrifice offer'd up to me, or I'll never accept of his ſervices: a lover leſs eſteem'd wou'd be of no value, I ſhou'd deſpiſe him.

DAMIS.

I can make you eaſy on that head, my dear; I have made ſome pretty good conqueſts, and perhaps as expeditiouſly as moſt men: I believe I can boaſt of tolerable ſucceſs that way: many a fine woman has run after me; another man wou'd be vain upon it: I cou'd reckon up a few of your nice ladies who are not over coy to me.

HORTENSIA.

Well, but who, who are they?

DAMIS.

Only give the word, my Julia, and I begin the ſacrifice: there is, firſt, the little Iſabel; ſecondly, the

lively

lively ſmart Erminia; then there's Clarice, Ægle, Doris ——

HORTENSIA.

Poor pitiful offerings, I cou'd have a hundred ſuch every day: theſe will never do: they are lov'd, and turn'd off again twenty times in a week: let me have ſome reſpectable names, women of character, ſuch as I may triumph over without a bluſh: if you cou'd reckon amongſt your captives, one, who, before ſhe ſaw the incomparable Damis, was invulnerable, one who in all actions paid the ſtricteſt regard to decency and decorum, ſome modeſt prudent fair, who never felt a weakneſs but for you, that wou'd be the woman.

DAMIS. [Sitting down by her.

Now then, obſerve me: I have a miſtreſs who exactly reſembles in every feature the picture you have drawn: but you wou'd not have me be ſo indiſcreet as to ——

HORTENSIA.

Not for the world.

DAMIS.

If I was imprudent enough to tell her name, I ſhou'd call her——Hortenſia. Why do you ſtartle at *it? I think* not of her whilſt my Julia's here: ſhe is nei-

ther

ther young nor handſome when you are by: beſides, there is a certain young Abbé who is very familiar with her; and, between you and I, her couſin Traſimon is too apt to come to her in an evening over the garden wall.

HORTENSIA. [Aſide.

To join calumny thus to his infidelity, execrable villain! but I muſt diſſemble: pray, Damis, on what footing are you with Hortenſia? does ſhe love you?

DAMIS.

O to diſtraction, that's the truth of it.

HORTENSIA. [Aſide.

Impudence and falſehood to the higheſt degree!

DAMIS.

'Tis even ſo, I aſſure you, I wou'd not tell you a lye for the world.

HOETENSIA. [Aſide.

The villain!

DAMIS.

But what ſignifies thinking about her? we did not meet here to talk of Hortenſia: come, let us rather——

HORTENSIA.

I can never believe Hortenſia wou'd ever have given herſelf up ſo totally to you.

DAMIS.

DAMIS.

I tell you, I have it under her own hand.

HORTENSIA.

I don't believe a word of it.

DAMIS.

'Tis inſulting me to doubt it.

HORTENSIA.

Let me ſee it then.

DAMIS.

You injure me, madam: there, read, perhaps you know her hand.

[Gives her the letter.

HORTENSIA. [Unmasking.

I do, villain, and know your treachery: at length I have in ſome meaſure atoned for my folly, and have luckily recover'd both the picture and the letter, which I had ventur'd to truſt in ſuch unworthy hands: 'tis done: now Traſimon, and Clitander, appear.

SCENE XXI.

HORTENSIA, DAMIS, TRASIMON, CLITANDER.

HORTENSIA. [To Clitander.

If I have not yet offended you beyond a poſſibility of pardon; if you can ſtill love Hortenſia, my hand, my fortune, and my life are your's.

CLI-

CLITANDER.

O Hortenſia, behold at your feet a deſpairing lover, who receives your kind offer with joy, and tranſport.

TRASIMON. [To Damis.

Did not I tell you, ſir, I ſhou'd bring her to a right way of thinking? this marriage, ſir, is my making: now, Damis, fare you well, and henceforth, learn to diſſemble better, or never attempt it more.

DAMIS.

Juſt heaven! for the future how ſhall I venture to ſpeak at all?

ZARA.

A

TRAGEDY.

AN EPISTLE DEDICATORY TO Mr. FALKNER, an Engliſh Merchant, Since Ambaſſador at CONSTANTINOPLE, WITH The TRAGEDY of ZARA.

My dear friend,

YOU are an *Engliſhman*, and I a native of *France*; but all lovers of the fine arts are fellow-citizens: men of taſte and virtue have pretty nearly the ſame principles in every country, and form one general common-weal: it is no longer therefore matter of aſtoniſhment to ſee a *French* tragedy dedicated to an *Engliſhman*, or an *Italian*, any more than it wou'd have been, in the days of antiquity, for a citizen of *Epheſus*, or of *Athens*, to addreſs his performance to a *Grecian* of ſome other city: I lay this tragedy before you therefore as my countryman in literature, and my moſt intimate friend.

That

I ſhall, at the ſame time, have the pleaſure of informing my brother *Frenchmen* here in what light traders are look'd upon amongſt you, what regard the *Engliſh* have for a profeſſion ſo eſſential to the welfare of their kingdom, and the honour which they have to repreſent their country in parliament, in the rank of legiſlators: Though trade is deſpiſed by our petits-maitres, who, you know as well as myſelf, both in *England* and *France*, are the moſt contemptible ſpecies of being that craul upon the face of the earth.

My further inducement to correſpond with an *Engliſhman*, rather than any other man, on ſubjects of literature, ariſes from your happy freedom of thought, which never fails to inſpire me with bolder ideas, and more nervous expreſſion. * ' Whoever converſes with me has, for the time at leaſt, my heart at his diſpoſal; if his ſentiments are lively and animated, he inflames me: if he is ſtrong and nervous, he raiſes and ſupports me: the courtier, who is all

* The paſſages which I have incloſ'd between aſteriſks, and mark'd thus ' ' are, in the original, written in a familiar kind of verſes, conſiſting of eight ſyllables, which *Mr. Voltaire* is, in moſt of his letters, fond of intermingling with his proſe: the reader will eaſily perceive that, however agreeable thoſe rhimes might be to a *French* ear, both the ſubject and ſtile, in the greater part of them, are of ſuch a nature, as not to admit of an *Engliſh* poetical *tranſlation*.

' diſſimu-

diſſimulation, makes me inſenſibly as affected and conſtrain'd in my behaviour as himſelf; but a bold and fearleſs ſpirit gives me ſentiment and courage: I catch fire from him, juſt as young painters, brought up under *le Moine* or *Argiliere*, catch the freedom of their maſter's pencils, and compoſe with their ſpirit: thus *Virgil* admir'd *Homer*, follow'd his ſteps, and, without being a plagiary from him, became his rival.'

You need not be apprehenſive of my ſending you, with this piece, a long apology and vindication of it: I might indeed have told you, why I did not make *Zara* more determin'd to embrace chriſtianity before ſhe knew her father; why ſhe keeps the ſecret from her lover, &c. but thoſe who have any judgment, or any juſtice, will ſee my reaſons without my pointing them out; and as for thoſe criticks who are predetermin'd not to believe me, it wou'd be loſt labour to give them any reaſons at all.

All I can boaſt of is, that the piece is tolerably ſimple; a perfection, in my opinion, that is not to be deſpis'd.

'This happy ſimplicity was one of the diſtinguiſhing beauties of learned antiquity; 'tis pity you *Engliſhmen* don't introduce this novelty on your ſtage, which

is ſo fill'd with horror, gibbets, and murthers: put more truth into your dramatic performances, and more noble images: *Addiſon* has endeavour'd at it: he was the poet of the wiſe, but he was too ſtiff: and, in his boaſted Cato, the two girls are really very inſipid characters: imitate from the great *Addiſon* only what is good; poliſh a little the rude manners of your wild muſe; write for all times, and all ages, for fame, and for poſterity, and transfuſe into your works the ſimplicity of your manners.'

But I wou'd not have your *Engliſh* poets imagine, that I mean to give them *Zara* as a model: I preach ſimplicity to them, and eaſy numbers, but I wou'd not be thought to ſet up for the ſaint of my own ſermon: if *Zara* has met with ſucceſs, I owe it not ſo much to the merit of the performance, as to the tenderneſs of the love ſcenes, which I was wiſe enough to execute as well as I poſſibly cou'd: in this I flatter'd the taſte of my audience; and he is generally ſure to ſucceed, who talks more to the paſſions of men than to their reaſon: if we are ever ſo good chriſtians, we muſt have a little love beſides: and I am ſatisfy'd the great *Corneille* was much in the right of it, not to confine himſelf, in his *Polyeucte*, merely to the breaking of the ſtatues of Jupiter

piter by the new converts: for ſuch is the depravity of human kind, that perhaps

'The pious ſoul of *Polyeucte* wou'd have but little impreſſion on the audience, and even the chriſtian verſes he declaims wou'd have been receiv'd with contempt, if it had not been for his wife's paſſion for her favourite heathen, who was certainly more worthy of her love than the good devotee her huſband.' Almoſt the ſame accident happen'd to *Zara*: all my friends, who frequent the theatre, aſſur'd me, that if ſhe had been only converted, ſhe wou'd not have been half ſo intereſting: but ſhe was in love with the moſt perfect religion in the world, and that has made her fortune: I cou'd not however expect to eſcape cenſure.

'Many an inexorable critick has carp'd at and ſlath'd me, and many a remorſeleſs jeſter has pretended that I only filch'd an improbable Romance, which I had not the ſenſe to improve; that I have lamed and ſpoil'd the ſubject; that the cataſtrophe is unnatural: they even prognoſticated the dreadful hiſs with which a diſguſted public ſalutes a miſerable poet: but I deſpis'd their cenſures, and riſk'd my play upon the ſtage; the public was more favourable than they expected, or I deſerv'd; inſtead of hiſſes, it was receiv'd with ſhouts: tears flow'd almoſt from every eye: but I am

I am not puff'd up with my ſucceſs, I aſſure you I am no ſtranger to all its faults. I know very well it is abſolutely indiſputable, that before we can make a perfect work, we muſt ſell ourſelves to the devil, which was what I did not chuſe to do.'

I do not flatter myſelf that the *Engliſh* will do *Zara* the ſame honour they have done to *Brutus*, a* tranſlation of which has been play'd at *London*: they tell us here, that you have neither devotion enough to be affected by old *Luſignan*, nor tenderneſs to feel for *Zara*: you love a conſpiracy better than an intrigue: upon your ſtage, they ſay the word, country, is ſure of getting a clap, and ſo is, love, upon ours; but to ſay the truth, you have as much love in your tragedies as we have: if you have not the reputation of being tender, it is not that your ſtage heroes are not in love, but that they ſeldom expreſs their paſſion naturally: our lovers talk like lovers; yours like poets.

But if the *French* are your ſuperiors in gallantry, there are many things which, in return, we may borrow of you: to the *Engliſh* theatre I am indebted for the liberty which I have taken of bringing the names of our kings and antient families upon the ſtage: a

* Mr. *Voltaire* was miſtaken in this particular, as no tranſlation of his *Brutus* was ever exhibited on the *Engliſh* ſtage.

novelty

novelty of this kind may perhaps be the means of introducing amongſt us a ſpecies of tragedy hitherto unknown, and which we ſeem to want. Some happy geniuſſes will, I make no doubt, riſe up, who will bring to perfection that idea, of which *Zara* is but a ſlight ſketch: as long as literature meets with protection in *France*, we ſhall always have writers enough: nature every day forms men of talents and abilities; we have nothing to do but to encourage and employ them: but if thoſe which diſtinguiſh themſelves are not ſupported by ſome honourable recompence, and by the ſtill more pleaſing charm of admiration, all the fine arts muſt ſoon periſh, even though ſo many edifices have been rais'd to ſhelter and protect them: the noble plantation of *Louis* XIV. wou'd die away for want of culture: the public might ſtill have taſte, but there wou'd be no eminent maſters: the ſculptor in his academy wou'd ſee a number of indifferent pupils about him, but never have the ambition to imitate *Girardon* and *Pujet*: the painter wou'd reſt ſatisfy'd with excelling his cotemporaries, but wou'd never think of rivalling *Pouſſin*: may the ſucceſſors of Lewis XIV. always follow the example of that great monarch, who inſpir'd every artiſt with emulation! encourag'd at the ſame time a *Racine* and a *Van-Robais*: he carry'd our com-

merce and our glory to the furtheſt part of the globe, and extended his bounty to foreigners of all nations, who were aſtoniſh'd at the fame and rewards which our court beſtow'd upon them: wherever merit appear'd it found a patron in *Louis* XIV.

Where'er that bounteous ſtar its influence ſhed,
Fair merit rais'd her long-declining head;
His royal hand ſpread honours, wealth, and fame,
Then *Viviani*, then *Caſſini* came:
Newton refus'd a gift from *France*'s throne,
Or *Newton* too, thou know'ſt, had been our own:
Theſe are the deeds that raiſe our *Gallia*'s fame,
Theſe, *Louis*, will immortaliſe thy name,
And truly make thee, what thou wert deſign'd,
The univerſal monarch of mankind.

You have no foundations equal to the munificent donations of our kings; but then your people ſupplies the want of them: you don't ſtand in need of royal favour to honour and reward ſuperior talents of every kind. *Steel* and *Vanbrugh* were comedy writers, and at the ſame time members of parliament: the primacy given to Dr. *Tillotſon*, *Newton* honour'd with an important truſt, *Prior* made an ambaſſador, and *Addiſon* a miniſter of ſtate, are but the common and ordinary conſequences of the regard which you pay to merit,

and

and to great men: you heap riches on them whilſt they live, and erects monuments and ſtatues to them after their death: even your celebrated actreſſes have places in your churches, near the great poets.

'Your *Oldfield*, and her predeceſſor, *Bracegirdle*, in conſideration of their having been ſo agreeable to the public when in their prime, their courſe finiſh'd, were, by the conſent of your whole nation, honour'd with a pompous funeral, and their remains carry'd under a velvet pall, and lodg'd in your church with the greateſt magnificence: their ſpirits, no doubt, are ſtill proud of it, and boaſt of the honour in the ſhades below: whilſt the divine *Moliere*, who was far more worthy of it, cou'd ſcarce obtain leave to ſleep in a church-yard; and the amiable *Le Couvreur*, whoſe eyes I clos'd, cou'd not even ſo much as obtain two wax-tapers and a coffin; Monſ. *de Laubiniere*, out of charity, carry'd away her corpſe by night in a hackney-coach to the banks of the river: do you not even now ſee the god of love breaking his arrows in a rage, and *Melpomene* in tears, baniſhing herſelf from that ungrateful place which *le Couvreur* had ſo long adorn'd?'

'But every thing, in theſe our days, conſpires to reduce *France* to that ſtate of barbariſm from which *Louis* XIV. and cardinal *Richlieu* had deliver'd her: a curſe on that policy which knows not the value of the fine arts! the world is peopled with nations as powerful as our own; how happens it then that we look on them with ſo little eſteem? for the ſame reaſon perhaps that we deſpiſe the company of a rich man, whoſe mind is taſteleſs and uncultivated: do not imagine that this empire of wit, this glory of being the univerſal model for mankind, is a trifling diſtinction, it is the infallible mark of the grandeur of a kingdom: under the greateſt princes the arts have always flouriſh'd, and their decay is often ſucceeded by that of the ſtate itſelf: hiſtory will ſupply us with ample proofs of it; but this wou'd lead me too far out of my ſubject: I ſhall finiſh this letter, which is already too long, with a little performance, which naturally demands a place at the head of this tragedy: an epiſtle, in verſe, to the actreſs who play'd the part of *Zara*; I owe her at leaſt this compliment for the manner in which ſhe acquitted herſelf on that occaſion.

'For the prophet of *Mecca* never had *Greek* or *Arabian* in his ſeraglio ſo beautiful or ſo genteel: her black eyes, ſo finely arch'd and full of tender-

'neſs,

neſs, with her excellent voice, mien and carriage, defended my performance againſt every auditor that had a mind to be troubleſome: but when the reader catches me in his cloſet, all my honour, I fear, will be loſt.'

Adieu, my dear friend, continue to cultivate philoſophy and the Belles-letters, without forgetting to ſend your ſhips to the *Levant*.

I have the honour to remain, &c.

A SECOND LETTER TO Mr. FALKNER,

Then Ambaſſador at CONSTANTINOPLE,

From the Second Edition of the Tragedy of ZARA.

My dear friend,

FOR your new dignity of ambaſſador only makes our friendſhip more reſpectable, and ſhall not prevent my making uſe of a title even more facred than that of miniſter; the name of *Friend* is much above that of, *your Excellency*. I now dedicate to the ambaſſador of a great king, and a free nation, what I had before addreſs'd to a plain citizen, and an Engliſh merchant: thoſe who know how much commerce is reſpected in your country, muſt know that a tradeſman is there ſometimes a legiſlator, a good officer, and a public miniſter.

Some ridiculous people, who had fall'n in with the faſhion, of paying reſpect to nothing but nobility, thought proper to laugh at the novelty of a dedication

to

to a man who had nothing but merit to recommend him: who took the liberty, on a ſtage ſacred to calumny and bad taſte, to inſult the author of that dedication, and to* reproach the gentleman to whom it was addres'd for being a merchant: but we muſt not, ſir, impute to our whole nation an affront ſo groſs and illiberal, that people, ever ſo uncivilis'd, wou'd have been aſham'd to commit. The magiſtrates of our police, who are conſtantly employ'd in rectifying abuſes of this kind, were, to the laſt degree, ſurpris'd at it: but the contempt and ignominy with which the public have branded the acknowledg'd author of this indignity, are, I hope, a freſh proof of *French* politeneſs: thoſe virtues, which form the character of a whole people, are often contradicted, and, as it were, call'd in queſtion by the vices of an individual: there were ſome voluptuaries, we know, even at *Lacedæmon*: there have been low and fooliſh fellows in England; men without taſte, or good breeding, at *Athens*; and ſo there are in *Paris*.

* Mr. Falkner, and ſome other gentlemen of character, were affronted at the *Theatre Italienne* at Paris, by ſome injurious reflections thrown out upon them in a contemptible farce exhibited there, which was hiſs'd by the audience.

You will, I hope, forget them, ſir, as they are forgotten by the world, and receive this ſecond mark of my reſpects: they are due to you ſtill more than they were before, as this tragedy has made its appearance at *London*. It has been tranſlated, and acted with ſo much ſucceſs, and the author of it ſpoken of with ſo much regard and politeneſs, that I ought to return my public thanks to the whole nation.

I do not know how to acquit my obligations to you by any other means, than acquainting my countrymen here with the particulars of the tranſlation, and repreſentation of *Zara* on the *Engliſh* ſtage.

Mr. *Hill*, a man of letters, and one who ſeems to underſtand the theatre better than any *Engliſh* author, did me the honour to tranſlate this piece, with the deſign of introducing ſomething new on your ſtage, both with regard to the manner of writing tragedies, and of repeating them. I ſhall ſpeak, by and by, of the repreſentation.

The art of declaiming was for a long time amongſt you intirely out of nature; moſt of your tragic actors expreſſed themſelves more like poets ſeized with rapturous enthuſiaſm, than like men inſpired by a real paſſion. Several of your comedians were even more intolerable, they roared out their verſes with

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an impetuous fury, that was no more like the natural tone, than convulſions and diſtortions are to an eaſy and noble carriage. This air of riot and tumult ſeemed intirely foreign to your nation, which is naturally ſober and grave, even to ſuch a degree, as frequently to appear cold and unanimated in the eye of a ſtranger. Your preachers never indulge themſelves in a declamatory tone, and you would laugh at a pleader at the bar, who ſhould work himſelf up into a paſſion: the players were the only outragious ſet of people in the kingdom. Our actors and actreſſes alſo, particularly the latter, were guilty of this for many years. M. *le Couvreur* was the firſt who broke them of it: thus an *Italian* writer, a man of great ſenſe and parts, ſpeaks of her:

La legiadra Couvreur ſola non trotta
Per quella ſtrade dove i ſuoi compagni
Van di galoppo tutti quanti in frotta,
Se auvien ch'ella pianga, o che ſi lagni
Senza quelli urli ſpaventoſi loro
Ti muove ſi che in pianger l'accompagni.

The ſame change which *le Couvreur* effected on our ſtage, Mrs. *Cibber* brought about on your's, in the part of *Zara*: how aſtoniſhing it is, that in every art it ſhould

ſhould be ſo long before we arrive at the ſimple and the natural!

A novelty that muſt appear ſtill more extraordinary to a *Frenchman* is, that a gentleman of your country *, a man of rank and fortune, ſhould condeſcend to play the part of *Oſman*. It was an intereſting circumſtance to ſee the two principal characters repreſented, one by a perſon of condition, and the other by a young actreſs not above eighteen years of age, who had never repeated a line before in her life. This inſtance of a gentleman's exerciſing his talents for declamation, is not ſingular amongſt you; it is perhaps more ſurpriſing that we ſhould wonder at it: we ought certainly to reflect, that every thing in this world depends upon cuſtom and opinion: the court of *France* have danc'd on the ſtage with the actors of the opera, and we thought there was nothing ſtrange in it, but that the faſhion of this kind of entertainment ſhould be diſcontinued. Why ſhould it be more extraordinary for people to write than to dance in pub-

* This gentleman whom Mr. *Voltaire* calls *a man of rank and fortune, and a perſon of condition*, who was ſo *condeſcending*, was nothing more than a nephew of *Aaron Hill*'s, who had more paſſion than genius for the ſtage, and play'd the part of *Oſman* ſo execrably, that he was hiſs'd off, and never, I believe, made his appearance there afterwards.

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ſic? is there any difference between theſe two arts, except that the one is as much above the other, as the perfections of the mind are ſuperior to thoſe of the body; I have ſaid it before, and I ſay ſo ſtill, none of the polite arts are contemptible; and to be aſham'd of talents of any kind, is of all things the moſt ſhameful.

I come now to the tranſlation of *Zara*, and the change which has been made amongſt you with regard to the drama.

You had a ſtrange cuſtom, which even Mr. *Addiſon*, the chaſteſt of your writers, adopted, ſo often does cuſtom get the better of ſenſe and reaſon; I mean, the ridiculous cuſtom of finiſhing every act by verſes in a different taſte from the reſt of the piece, which verſes uſually conſiſted of a ſimile. *Phædra*, as ſhe leaves the ſtage, compares herſelf to a bitch; *Cato* to a rock, and *Cleopatra* to children that cry themſelves aſleep. The tranſlator of *Zara* was the firſt who dared to maintain the rights of nature againſt a cuſtom ſo directly oppoſite to her *. He proſcrib'd

* A perſon unacquainted with the *Engliſh* ſtage would naturally imagine, from Mr. *Voltaire*'s character of *Aaron Hill*, that he was one of the greateſt poets we ever had; and yet, in reality, nothing can be more labour'd, ſtiff, and obſcure, than his ſtile and

proſcrib'd this cuſtom, well knowing that paſſion ſhould always ſpeak its own language, and that the poet ſhould diſappear, to make room for the hero.

Upon this principle he has tranſlated plainly, and without any unneceſſary ornaments, all the ſimple verſes of the piece, which muſt have been entirely ſpoiled by an endeavour to render them beautiful, ſuch as,

On ne peut deſirer ce qu'on ne connoît pas.

J' euſſe été pres du Gange eſclave des faux dieux
Chretienne dans Paris, Muſulmane en ces lieux.

Mais Oroſmane m'aime, & j'ai tout oublié

Non, la reconnoiſſance eſt un foible retour
Un tribut offenſant, trop peu fait pour l'amour.

Je me croírois hai d'etre aimé foiblement.

Je veux avev excés vous aimer & vous plaire

L'art ne'ſt pas fait pour toi, tu n'en a pas beſoin.

L'art le plus innocent tient de la perfidie.

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and expreſſion in every one of his pieces, though he was not without taſte, and ſentiment. But if Mr. *Voltaire* had not been ſway'd more by prejudice than judgment, he would not ſo raſhly have condemn'd our theatre, nor placed *Addiſon* at the head of *our dramatic* writers.

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All the verſes that are in this fine taſte of ſimplicity, are render'd word for word into *Engliſh*: they might very eaſily have been adorn'd, but the tranſlator judg'd in a different manner from ſeveral of my countrymen; he liked the verſes, and retained therefore all the ſimplicity of them; the ſtile indeed ought always to be agreeable to the ſubject; *Alzira*, *Brutus*, and *Zara*, for example, required three different kinds of verſification: if *Berenice* complained of *Titus*, and *Ariadne* of *Theſeus*, in the ſtile of *Cinna*, neither *Berenice* nor *Ariadne* would pleaſe or affect us; we can never talk well of love, if we ſearch after any other ornaments but truth and ſimplicity.

This is not the place to examine whether it be right or wrong, to put ſo much love into our dramatic performances: I will even allow it to be a fault, but it is a fault which will always be univerſal; nor do I know what name to give that fault, which is the delight of all mankind: one thing I am ſatisfy'd of, that the *French* have ſucceeded better in it than all other nations, antient and modern, put together: love appears on our ſtage with more decorum, more delicacy, and truth, than we meet with on any other; and the reaſon is, becauſe of all nations the *French* are beſt acquainted with ſociety: the perpetual commerce

and intercourſe of the two ſexes, carry'd on with ſo much vivacity and good breeding, has introduc'd amongſt us a politeneſs unknown to all the world but ourſelves.

Society principally depends on the fair ſex: all thoſe nations who are ſo unhappy as to confine their women are unſociable: the auſterity of your manners, your political quarrels, and religious wars, that render'd you ſavage and barbarous, depriv'd you, even down to the age of *Charles* II. of the pleaſures of ſociety, even in the boſom of liberty: the poets therefore, neither of your country, nor of any other, knew any thing of the manner in which love ought to be treated.

Good comedy was utterly unknown amongſt us till the days of *Moliere*; as was the art of expreſſing our ſentiments with delicacy till thoſe of *Racine*, becauſe ſociety had not attain'd to any degree of perfection before that time: a poet cannot paint in his cloſet, manners which he has never ſeen; and wou'd ſooner write a hundred odes and epiſtles than one ſcene where nature muſt ſpeak: your *Dryden*, who was in other reſpects a great genius, put into the mouth of his heroes in love, either high-flown ſtrains of rhetorical flouriſh, or ſomething indecent, two things equally oppoſite to tenderneſs.

If Mr. *Racine* makes *Titus* ſay,

Depuis cinq ans entiers chaque jour je la vois
Et croi toujours la voir pour la premiere fois.

Your *Dryden* makes *Antony* ſay,

——————how I lov'd,
Witneſs ye days and nights, and all ye hours,
That danc'd away with down upon your feet,
As all your buſineſs were to count my love,
One day paſt by, and nothing ſaw but love;
Another came, and ſtill 'twas only love:
The ſuns were weary'd out with looking on,
And I untir'd with loving———

It is very difficult to conceive that *Antony* ſhou'd ever really talk thus to *Cleopatra*. In the ſame play, *Cleopatra* ſpeaks thus to *Antony*:

Come to me, come my ſoldier, to my arms,
You've been too long away from my embraces;
But when I have you faſt, and all my own,
With broken murmurs, and with amorous ſighs,
I'll ſay, you were unkind, and puniſh you,
And mark you red with many an eager kiſs.

It is not improble but that *Cleopatra* might frequently talk thus, but indecencies of this kind are not to be repre-

repreſented before a reſpectable audience: ſome of your countrymen may perhaps ſay, this is pure nature; but we may tell them in anſwer, that if it be ſo, it is that nature which ought carefully to be conceal'd: it ſhews but little knowledge of human nature, to imagine that we can pleaſe the more by preſenting theſe licentious images; on the contrary, it is ſhutting up the avenues to true pleaſure: where every thing is at once diſcover'd, we are diſguſted; there remains no more to look for or deſire; and in our purſuit of pleaſure we meet with languor and ſatiety: this is the reaſon why thoſe, who are truly qualify'd for ſociety, taſte pleaſures far more exquiſite than groſſer appetites can have any idea of: the ſpectators, in this caſe, are like lovers who are ſatiated by too quick poſſeſſion: thoſe ideas which, when brought too cloſe, wou'd make us bluſh, ſhou'd be ſeen as it were thro' a cloud. It is this veil to which, to a right mind, they are indebted for all their charms: there is no pleaſure without decorum *. The *French* are certainly better acquainted with this than any other nation upon earth;

* There is no expreſſion in the *Engliſh* language which fully comprehends the meaning of the *French* word *Bienſéance*, which notwithſtanding, unfortunately for a tranſlator, being a favourite phraſe, recurs in almoſt every page: as does alſo the word *Naïveté*, for which we have no term in all reſpects correſpondent to it.

not

not becauſe they are *without genius and ſpirit*, as the unequal and impetuous *Dryden* has ridiculouſly aſſerted; but becauſe, ever ſince the regency of *Anne of Auſtria*, they have been the moſt ſociable and the moſt poliſh'd people in the univerſe: and this politeneſs is not an arbitrary thing, like what they call civility, but a law of nature, which they have happily cultivated far beyond any other nation.

The tranſlator of *Zara* has, almoſt throughout his whole piece, ſtrictly obſerv'd thoſe decencies of the ſtage which are common to us both; but there are, at the ſame time, ſome places where he has intirely adher'd to antient cuſtoms.

For inſtance, when in the *Engliſh* piece *Oſman* comes to tell *Zara* that he can no longer love her, ſhe anſwers him by *rolling upon the ground:* the Sultan is not mov'd at ſeeing her in this ridiculous poſture of deſpair, and yet the moment after is aſtoniſh'd at *Zara*'s weeping, and cries out,

Zara, thou weep'ſt.

He ſhou'd have ſaid to her before,

Zara, thou roll'ſt upon the ground.

Inſomuch that thoſe three words, *Zara, thou weep'ſt*, which have ſo fine an effect on our ſtage, have none on yours, becauſe they were diſplac'd: thoſe familiar and

ſimple

ſimple expreſſions derive all their power from the manner in which they are introduc'd. *My lord, you change countenance*, is nothing of itſelf: but when theſe words are pronounc'd by *Mithridates*, we ſhudder at them.

To ſay nothing but what we ought to ſay, and that in the manner in which it ought to be ſaid, is a point of perfection which the *French* have come nigher to than the writers, myſelf excepted, of other countries: on this ſubject we have, I think, a right to dictate to them: you can teach us perhaps greater and more uſeful things, we ought to acknowledge it. The *French*, who have wrote againſt ſir *Iſaac Newton*'s diſcoveries, with regard to light and colours, are aſham'd of it; thoſe who oppoſe his ſyſtem of gravitation will ſoon be ſtill more ſo.

You ought to ſubmit to our rules of the ſtage, as we ſubmit to your philoſophy: we have made as good experiments on the human heart, as you have in phyſics: the art of pleaſing ſeems to be the art of *Frenchmen*; the art of thinking is all your own. Happy are thoſe, ſir, who, like you, can unite them.

I am, SIR, &c.

END of the FOURTH VOLUME.

SM